PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 392

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

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4 November 2002

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 392**

TWENTY-THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 2001-2002

House of Commons

Monday 4 November 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

RAF Fairford

1. **Mr. Parmjit Dhanda** (Gloucester): If he will make a statement on flights over Gloucester by military aircraft from RAF Fairford. [76685]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Military aircraft using RAF Fairford would not normally fly over Gloucester.

Mr. Dhanda: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reassurance on that matter. He may be aware of correspondence that I received from the Under-Secretary of State for Defence on 29 August that said that the military flights over Gloucester spotted by some of my constituents may have been connected to the royal international air tattoo held between 19 and 21 July this year. Will my right hon. Friend prevail on the authorities at RAF Fairford, RAF Brize Norton and other air bases to ensure that hon. Members are informed when there is a possibility of flights over their constituencies as a result of air shows or tattoos?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I am sorry if such notification was not given on that occasion. It is not always RAF Fairford that is affected; Brize Norton can also be involved, as he rightly said. I assure him that we shall seek to notify hon. Members in the circumstances that he set out.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Minister will be aware that many of the aircraft that participate in the RAF Fairford tattoo also take part in the Farnborough air show, which employs many of my constituents—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Shipping Security

2. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): What plans he has to increase Royal Navy safeguards for British shipping; and if he will make a statement. [76694]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The Ministry of Defence works closely with other Government Departments on the protection of merchant shipping. The Royal Navy's worldwide maritime trade operations—known as MTO arrangements—enable it to offer a number of options to support merchant shipping. They range from the provision of routine advice and guidance to naval supervision of merchant vessels. Decisions about the timing and type of support offered are informed by the potential threat in any given region or area. For example, MTO arrangements in the Gulf have been enhanced since October last year. The threat to

merchant shipping is kept under constant review. If necessary, additional maritime trade operations measures can be implemented very quickly.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that shipping could be a soft target for terrorists in certain areas? The recent attack on the French tanker Limburg off the coast of Yemen was identified as a terrorist attack. Such incidents show the need for Royal Navy protection for British merchant ships in high-risk areas. He is aware that, following the new tax laws for British shipping, there has been a significant increase in British-registered merchant ships—more than 60 per cent. in the past few months—and a substantial increase in British operational interests. The need for the protection of the red ensign is, therefore, of paramount importance at all times. What protection, other than what he outlined in his reply, is the Royal Navy giving to our merchant shipping?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his concern on this important subject. I agree that we must keep the threat to shipping under close review. I am sure that he and other hon. Members will understand why I will not go into precise detail about that, but the MTO arrangements allow us to make a graduated response, giving the possibility of an appropriate and considered reaction to any increased threat. As I said earlier, the security arrangements for the Gulf region have been enhanced. Maritime trade operations remain under routine daily review by the Ministry of Defence, and can be changed very quickly in response to variations in the assessed threat level.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the Secretary of State tell us how many naval vessels are not currently operational and on duty, and what action he is taking urgently to bring more ships back into use?

Mr. Hoon: What I can tell the House is that the Royal Navy is in a position to carry out all the operations that it is required to, and to carry out the medium-scale war-fighting capability required under the defence planning assumptions. The right hon. Gentleman might like to know that Royal Navy vessels and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service are currently deployed in the Caribbean, the Gulf, the far east, the Mediterranean and the south Atlantic. In addition, they continue to undertake operational training.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): According to *The Telegraph*, the journal of the Merchant Navy officers' union NUMAST—the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers—there have been some 2,300 terrorist or pirate attacks on merchant ships over the past 10 years, in which 280 seafarers have been killed and more than 270 seriously injured. Taking into account this worldwide issue, and the fact that companies are cutting crews, will my right hon. Friend speak to his colleagues in other Departments about the whole issue of safe manning levels and the ability to mount safe patrols on the ships?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question, and I know how conscientiously he pursues merchant shipping matters. I assure him, as I assured the House a few minutes ago, that the Ministry of Defence takes considerable interest in the matter, and we are in regular contact with other Departments to respond to any enhanced threat to merchant shipping, wherever it is in the world.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): But why would not the Secretary of State answer my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)? In the light of the recent threat to a Royal Navy ship in the straits of Gibraltar and the attack on a French tanker lying off Yemen mentioned by the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), are not the Government gambling with Britain's maritime security by allowing half the fleet to remain out of action? Can the Secretary of State confirm weekend press reports that at least two front-line RAF Tornado interceptor squadrons are similarly out of action? Does not all that graphically show that there is no spare capacity and that the Government are simply not prepared for the unexpected?

Mr. Hoon: It is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman believes everything he reads in the weekend newspapers and, moreover, comes to the House with that material and chooses to run down the capability of the armed forces. Had he listened to my answer to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) more carefully than he apparently did, he would have noticed that the operational responsibilities of the Royal Navy remain unaffected. It is capable of carrying out the range of activities according to the defence planning assumptions. Therefore, the number is not strictly relevant at this stage. Provided that it can carry out the range of its requirements under the assumptions that are set down, that should be an end of the matter. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman, who claims to take an interest in matters military and the armed forces, should come to the House and run down this country's military capabilities.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Has my right hon. Friend called for an assessment of the implications for the safety of British shipping caused by the delay in getting the Nimrod aircraft back in service? When does he expect it to return to service?

Mr. Hoon: Obviously, there are concerns about the availability of Nimrod. That matter is, for the moment at any rate, the responsibility of BAE Systems. We have a very clear contract with it for the delivery of those aircraft. Obviously, this is a matter that we keep under constant review. I assure my hon. Friend that there is no extra threat to the safety and security of our shipping, because the protection afforded by existing aircraft is quite sufficient for the moment.

Reservists (Call-up)

4. **Harry Cohen** (Leyton and Wanstead): What call-up of reservists he has (a) made recently and (b) plans to make and for what reasons; and if he will make a statement. [76696]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): A call-out order was made on 14 October 2002 in support of operations in Afghanistan and related operations against international terrorism. This was purely for the continuation of existing operations. In line with our policy since the strategic defence review, any substantial new operation would require support from reservists. That would be the subject of a separate call-out order at the appropriate time.

Harry Cohen: Would not such a separate call-out order suggest that the Government are prepared to go on with a war against Iraq with little regard for international law or the United Nations process? Is not *The Daily Telegraph* correct today in saying that such a call-out is likely to be done by Queen's order, which was last used in the Korean war and would criminalise those who do not want to volunteer for such a call-out? Is the advice given by officials to my right hon. Friend, as quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, correct—that there would not be sufficient volunteers if the call-up were voluntary? Would not such a call-up have a draconian effect on the national health service and on businesses and employers?

Mr. Hoon: I have just warned Conservative Members about the dangers of believing what they read in the newspapers. According to this morning's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, I am supposedly announcing the mobilisation of reserves today. I can tell the House, and *The Daily Telegraph*, if any of its correspondents have chosen to be here, that that is not true. No such order is being made today. Military action against Iraq is neither imminent nor inevitable. In those circumstances, I can reassure my hon. Friend, I hope, that if it is necessary to call out reserves, the House will be the first to know.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I am grateful for the Secretary of State's final remarks, because I am sure that he agrees that such speculation affects the individuals concerned and their families. The best way to ensure that there is no such speculation is for him to reassure the House of Commons, as he has just done, that there will be a full statement or a full debate in the House before any reservists are called up, so that the announcement is made here, not in the press.

Mr. Hoon: I am sure that that is absolutely right. The subject of the question was the call-out of reservists and the procedures that would be necessary. Obviously a call-out order would be necessary, and would have to be laid before the House in the normal way.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Did my right hon. Friend notice that, according to *The Daily Telegraph*, certain Labour Members were primed to ask this question? Had that been so, would he have chosen as his conduits my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) for Question 4 and me for Question 17?

If my right hon. Friend is going to do this, should it really be done through the royal prerogative? Perhaps the royal prerogative is not the right way in which to do it.

Mr. Hoon: Let me come to the rescue of my hon. Friend's reputation, and indeed that of my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen). Neither would be regarded as the usual suspects in connection with the tabling of the sort of question on which *The Daily Telegraph* speculated—wrongly—this morning.

As for the royal prerogative and the substance of my hon. Friend's question, as he knows much better than I—given his much longer experience of this place—that is the way in which these things are done in the United Kingdom. That has always been the case, and I anticipate that it always will be.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does the Secretary of State accept that one of the most overstretched, vulnerable and important parts of the reserve forces is the medical reserves—not least because many of them are extremely vulnerable in their civilian jobs, which are mostly in the national health service? What inquiry has been made into the recent disastrous decision to mobilise a large number of them compulsorily, and send them home shortly afterwards having found that they were not needed?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that our medical reserves are overstretched, but I certainly accept that, as a result of the disastrous decisions of the last Government about medical support for our armed forces—[*Interruption.*] Opposition Members are gesticulating wildly, and one says, "Five years". I suggest that he ring his local medical school and find out how long it takes to train a doctor. He will find that it takes rather longer than five years, which is why direct responsibility for the shortage of doctors and other trained medical staff lies with the last Conservative Government, who affected the way in which we support our armed forces so disastrously.

I am not at all content with the number of doctors and other medical support staff. We are taking urgent action to deal with that.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I recall that during the defence reviews of the 1990s, the Labour party complained that we had not cut enough. I should remind the Secretary of State of that.

The right hon. Gentleman's body language suggests that nothing could be further from his mind than the suggestion that there might be a substantial call-out of reservists and the Territorial Army over the next few months. We all know that that likelihood must in fact be at the front of his mind. We have no doubt that the armed forces, the Territorials and the reserves will do all that they can to deliver a professional and excellent service to this country if such a call arises; but the impression that we continue to receive from the right hon. Gentleman's Department is that he is unprepared for the unexpected.

We already have reservists spread across the world, from Northern Ireland to the Balkans and Afghanistan. The strategic defence review went much further, cutting the core element of the reserve forces, the Territorial Army. Will the Secretary of State now admit that that was a mistake; and has he set a new, increased target for the TA?

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman had to ramble through a series of observations before asking a specific question, but I will do my best to deal with his apparently unconnected remarks.

Military action against Iraq is neither imminent nor inevitable. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as any other Member that any substantial military operation nowadays would require support from reservists, and our planning processes take that into account. As I have said, there has been no decision on that, and as soon as a decision is made the House will of course be informed in the normal way, following a call-out order.

We have debated here, on a number of occasions, the appropriate number of reservists who might be required. He knows as well as the House does—it was set out in a White Paper and the House has debated the new chapter of the strategic defence review—that we propose adjustments in the number and organisation of our reservists. That will not come as any great surprise to him or any other Member.

Mr. Jenkin: The answer is that the Secretary of State is still thinking about it and he has not got a policy. Does he recall the difficulties faced by his Department when it was suggested that we might have to mobilise reservists for the Kosovo conflict? The Select Committee report on the strategic defence review and the reserve forces stated:

"If the MoD had had to mobilise up to 18,000 reservists it is hard to imagine that it would have been achievable in an orderly and efficient manner using present facilities and procedures."

The deputy inspector general of the Territorial Army is quoted as saying:

"The problem we had in planning was that we had to do a hell of a lot of work in a hell of a hurry."

Have we learned the lessons of the Kosovo conflict or, if it becomes necessary to have such a call-out again, will we face the same problems?

Mr. Hoon: I am slightly surprised that the hon. Gentleman should choose Kosovo as an example. The British forces' action in Kosovo in the spring and summer of 1999 was a remarkable and successful operation. Given the date and circumstances of the operation, it is a dangerous example for a Front-Bench spokesman of the Conservative party to use, given that it was responsible for the organisation of reservists in 1997. I am sorry if he has to go back that far for his illustration. The reality is that we have a clear policy on reservists, which was set out in the strategic defence review and repeated again in the new chapter to that review. Both have been thoroughly and fully debated in the House.

Mr. Jenkin: I simply asked what lessons have been learned from the preparations for a mobilisation four years ago. The Secretary of State did not suggest a single one. I remind him that it took six months to mobilise the 3rd Military Intelligence Battalion before a single reservist was deployed on operations in the past 12 months. It is interesting that the Prime Minister said that the only orders laid have been routine ones, and brushed aside any suggestion of a call-up in the near future. Is the Secretary of State ruling out a major call-up of the reserves in the next few months? How much warning will reservists get? Preparations by the United States are already much in advance of ours.

Mr. Hoon: Again, on both counts, the hon. Gentleman should look more carefully before he asks such questions. The United States has arrangements for the call-out of reservists very similar to ours. If he checked before asking those rather foolish questions, he would find that the United States has not taken any decision on reserves either. I answered his question a few moments ago when I said that any substantial military operation requires support from reservists, and all our planning processes take that into account. If it is necessary to call out reservists, we will do so.

Recruitment

5. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): What measures the Ministry of Defence is taking to promote the armed forces to students in school. [76697]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): All three services have school presentation teams and careers advisers who, between them, last year undertook visits to over 4,600 schools. Their purpose is to raise awareness of, and provide information on, careers opportunities in the armed forces. In addition, a schools adviser team has been operating since November 2001, using a trial presentation to raise awareness among year 10 pupils of the role played by the armed forces and the Ministry of Defence at home and abroad.

Tony Cunningham: As a member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme linked with the RAF—I know that other hon. Members involved are also in their places—I am very aware of the tremendous role that the armed forces play. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that the initiatives that he mentions are linked to the national curriculum?

Mr. Ingram: As a graduate of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I am always pleased to hear it getting a plug. I encourage more right hon. and hon. Members to participate in that excellent scheme.

My hon. Friend raises an important issue. It is important that our involvement in schools benefits both teachers and students. The schools presentation team has designed material to fit in around the national curriculum, using real-life experiences in the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces. We are developing that material with the DFES and its counterparts in Scotland and Wales, and working with teachers and schools to help ensure that it is useful and relevant to their needs. This is a very good example of Departments working

together at national and local level to ensure that students, teachers and the Ministry of Defence benefit from the work.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Will the Minister give us his experience of any similarities or differences in promoting the armed forces to students in schools in Northern Ireland, especially during the period when Martin McGuinness was Minister of Education?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman is asking me to go back some time in my experience. I was not wholly conscious of such a process taking place in schools in Northern Ireland, but there is no reason why it should not. That would be a very good indication of the normalcy that we all hoped would apply in Northern Ireland. I shall consider the matter to see whether there are any differences in Northern Ireland and exactly what we are doing there.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): In view of the significant under-representation of ethnic minorities in the armed forces, what special initiatives have been taken to recruit ethnic minority students into the armed forces, and what success has there been to date?

Mr. Ingram: A number of important initiatives have been taken to address this key issue. We are beginning to achieve a measure of success, although we are not achieving the percentage that we had hoped for in the overall numbers of ethnic community members joining the armed forces. None the less, we are beginning to see an upward trend. That is based on using good exemplars in key areas in London and other parts of England to look at areas where we can draw from those communities. Members of ethnic communities who join the armed forces give top-class service and become good exemplars in their communities.

A400M

6. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will make a statement on the A400M programme. [76698]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): We remain committed to purchasing 25 A400M aircraft. Belgium, France, Turkey and Spain also remain firmly committed to the programme. However, there is still uncertainty about the position of Portugal, and we still await resolution of the German funding issues. In the interim, we continue to work with all our partners to bring the signed contract into effect as soon as possible

Mr. Turner: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. I am sure that he will be aware of the concern with which those in the aerospace industry view the A400M programme and the difficulties with our German partners. Can he confirm that there is a deadline for confirmation of this important programme, which will please so many of my constituents in East Cowes?

Mr. Hoon: I emphasise to the hon. Gentleman and the House that the United Kingdom wants to see this programme move forward. The contract will enter into force once Germany has the approval of the Bundestag for funding and can make its full commitment to the programme. Continued participation of other nations, including the United Kingdom, is subject to that German signature becoming effective without any qualifications. However, there is no specific deadline in the way that his question suggests.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Is not the truth that this programme was always more political than military, and that it does not represent good value for money compared with the alternatives available? Should not the Government try to get out of this contract as soon as possible?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that for a moment. The A400M is the best deal for the Royal Air Force, the taxpayer and British industry. I am surprised to hear a senior and experienced Conservative Member make a suggestion that would clearly be extraordinarily detrimental to Britain's military capability and, crucially, to British jobs.

BAE Systems

7. **Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): What role his Department has had in the promotion of arms sales by BAE Systems in the last two years, with particular reference to spare parts. [76699]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The Government are committed to encouraging and supporting legitimate United Kingdom defence exports. The Defence Export Services Organisation—DESO—within the Ministry of Defence is responsible for co-ordinating such support. In line with that policy, DESO has provided varied assistance to BAE Systems during the past two years, across a number of potential overseas defence requirements.

Paul Farrelly: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. He will be aware of the United Nations panel report, issued a fortnight ago, into illegal exploitation of resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The report had wide press coverage and alleged, in particular, the busting of EU sanctions by Mr. John Bredenkamp, a Berkshire-based arms dealer. It stated that, earlier this year, that gentleman had brokered the delivery for the Zimbabwean air force, either directly or via a third country, of spare parts for Hawk jets made by British Aerospace. Will the Secretary of State undertake to investigate those serious allegations with the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry, review any relationships between his Department and Mr. Bredenkamp, as well as any role anywhere in the export of Hawk spares by British Aerospace; and report back on his conclusions and thereby play his part—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the Secretary of State could manage an answer.

Mr. Hoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had got the message.

The Government certainly take seriously all credible reports of misuse or diversion of UK exported equipment. All our overseas missions have standing instructions to look into and report on any allegations of such misuse in the countries that they cover.

As regards the specific allegations made by my hon. Friend, the Government are investigating the matter.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The Secretary of State may remember that BAE Systems in Woodford, on the edge of my constituency, is a major employer of my constituents. Will he take this opportunity to remind the House that legitimate sales by BAE Systems are good for jobs and investment in this country?

Mr. Hoon: I entirely agree with that observation. I only wish that the hon. Gentleman could have communicated that fact to his hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) a few minutes ago.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Can the Secretary of State tell us whether BAE Systems provided any parts or equipment for the grounded fleet of Apache helicopters? If so, will he tell the House what were the principal contributions made by British Aerospace?

Mr. Hoon: Certainly, BAE Systems contributes to the Apache programme, but may I make it clear to my hon. Friend that the problems mentioned by the National Audit Office in no way relate to the viability of Apache as a piece of military equipment? Indeed, the report indicates that Apaches are being delivered broadly to time and to cost. The specific problem that we have to deal with arises from the difficulties of securing appropriate software for the training simulator—a problem that would have arisen in any event, but one that we are obviously seeking urgently to resolve.

Wheeled Tanker Project

9. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): What criteria he will use to decide on the award of the contract for the wheeled tanker project. [76701]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The decision we reach will be based on ensuring the best capability for our armed forces at the best value for money, for defence and the British taxpayer. We will use a range of criteria to reach the decision for contract award, which will include technical and commercial compliance, through-life support and industrial participation.

Mrs. Campbell: When my right hon. Friend considers the award of that contract, will he take into account superior British technology, long experience in serving the MOD and excellent British workmanship? All are available from Marshall Aerospace in my constituency.

Mr. Ingram: We shall certainly take into account all those factors, whichever contractor bids for the project.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the prestigious company, Multidrive Ltd., in Thirsk in my constituency, which can outshine any bid. When might a decision be announced, bearing it in mind that, wherever possible, if all the criteria are met, including quality, on-time delivery and value for money, the Government will choose British?

Mr. Ingram: I cannot give the hon. Lady a precise month, but the decision is imminent. I suspect that is why there is so much public lobbying at present.

SA80

10. **Phil Sawford** (Kettering): What action he has taken to ensure the reliability of the SA80 rifle used by British forces. [76702]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The SA80 modification programme has significantly improved the reliability and performance of the weapon. Extensive trials were carried out across all climatic conditions before the modified weapon was introduced. More recent trials and demonstrations in Afghanistan and Oman have established beyond doubt that the weapon is reliable and accurate and can be maintained in an operational environment.

Phil Sawford: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. With much talk of a possible war with Iraq, many people, including my constituents, would wish to be reassured that our armed forces have reliable weapons, but will he tell the House who, if anyone, has accepted responsibility for the problems experienced with the SA80? Will he also tell the House who has paid the £80 million cost of the modifications to 300,000 rifles?

Mr. Ingram: Well, the taxpayer pays for the modifications. As for who takes responsibility, when we modified the weapon, we put it through an intensive trial period and, because of some issues relating to the maintenance regime, it was discovered that it was not always functioning in the way that had been anticipated. That is why we then put it back through an even more detailed set of conditions in very extreme circumstances. An important key to this, of course, was that the actual practitioners—not officials and certainly not Ministers—decided whether the weapon was reliable, but I suppose that Ministers ultimately take responsibility for decisions.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am delighted that the problems with at least one piece of equipment seem to be on the way to being solved, but would the Minister care to comment on replacing the British Army's combat helmet, which provides 40 per cent. less protection than any other helmet in NATO?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That question is far too wide.

Afghanistan

11. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What recent discussions he has had with international

partners regarding extending the mandate of the intervention force in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [76703]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The United Kingdom currently contributes about 400 British troops to the international security assistance force, based in Kabul. I have regular discussions with international colleagues about ISAF, including on the continuing need for such a force after the expiry of its current United Nations authorisation on 20 December this year.

Mr. Mullin: My I put it to my right hon. Friend that the situation in Afghanistan remains on a knife edge and that, unless ISAF's mandate is extended, there is a danger that Afghanistan will slide back into the sort of chaos that brought the Taliban to power in the first place? What discussions has he had with our allies about extending the mandate as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Hoon: I accept my hon. Friend's observation that there are continuing concerns about security in Afghanistan. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said only in September:

"I want to make it clear, once again, that we are entirely committed to its reconstruction. We will not desert the Afghan people. We will stick with them until the job . . . is done."—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2002; Vol. 390, c. 6.]

That is why we are having detailed discussions, particularly with the United States, on planning how the coalition can further stabilise Afghanistan and, together with other allies, are looking at a range of different possibilities, but I have to tell my hon. Friend and the House that it is rather too early to say what that might involve at this stage.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I am sure that all hon. Members will wish to praise the role of the British armed forces in Afghanistan under extremely difficult circumstances, but may I return the Secretary of State to the phrase "defence assumptions", which he used in answer to questions from my hon. Friend the Members for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin)? The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) made the very important point that the situation in Afghanistan is very delicate indeed. Can the right hon. Gentleman perhaps tell the House what contingency plans the Ministry of Defence has to reinforce British troops in Afghanistan if, unfortunately, the situation deteriorates, and whether that will have an adverse impact on the other preparations that the MOD is now making in relation to possible UN or other operations against Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his observations about British forces in Afghanistan, but it is only right that we should acknowledge the very considerable contribution made by other allies as well. Clearly, it is not simply for the United Kingdom to respond to any significant deterioration in the situation in Afghanistan. That would involve an effort by the international community, which is very well represented in Kabul and, indeed, in other operations in that country, so were there to be such a situation, we clearly have plans available that would allow the United Kingdom to make a contribution further to secure the situation in Afghanistan. As of today, I am delighted to say that that is not necessary, but it is obviously a matter that we keep under constant review.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Has my right hon. Friend seen reports that it is estimated that this year's poppy harvest in Afghanistan is something like 10 times larger than the harvest in the last year of the Taliban? Even if it is not larger to that degree but has none the less increased, will he assure me that the allied armed forces in Afghanistan are not in any way turning a blind eye to the cultivation of this crop as a quid pro quo for keeping warring factions together? He knows as well as I do that the crop will inevitably find its way on to the streets of his constituency and mine as heroin.

Mr. Hoon: I certainly share my hon. Friend's concern about the poppy harvest. I am not an expert on poppy cultivation, but I anticipate that he is rather ahead of things as regards the harvest. I am aware of speculation about the prospects for this year's production, and I assure him that we and other members of the international community keep that under review and are discussing urgently the steps that can be taken to limit the amount that is produced in Afghanistan.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that last December he gave me a categorical assurance that British troops would only be stationed in Afghanistan for a very short period? When I expressed scepticism about that, and predicted that they would remain for a very much longer period, he was firm in telling me that I was wrong. Why has the policy been changed?

Mr. Hoon: There has been no change in the policy. As I recall, the hon. Gentleman asked me about the duration of war-fighting operations, and I was able to tell him that those forces will be there for as long as necessary. We do not have significant numbers of British troops on the ground involved in war-fighting operations, and our contribution to the international security assistance force, as I explained to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, is significantly lower numerically than that of several other countries. That is why it is important that we recognise the contribution made by allies.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the United States has just withdrawn reconstruction aid from Masar-e-Sharif because it considers it too dangerous to allow its personnel to operate in that area? In view of that, can he explain to me what the coalition means by saying that it wishes to extend the ISAF effect outside Kabul?

Mr. Hoon: That is simply shorthand for the kinds of discussions that I indicated are taking place, involving the United Kingdom and other allies, about how best to secure other parts of Afghanistan away from Kabul. The idea is to find means of working with the

transitional Administration to ensure that the difficulties that I know have been a recurrent feature of Masar are not repeated elsewhere.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): May I take the Secretary of State back four questions, and confirm that the Opposition support the operations in Afghanistan? We believe that there should be more NATO involvement in the ISAF operations. What action is he taking to ensure greater involvement of NATO?

Mr. Hoon: ISAF is a UN peacekeeping operation, and, for the moment, I do not anticipate that there need be NATO involvement. The countries that supply troops to the ISAF operation are, by and large, members of NATO, although not exclusively so. Provided that there is sufficient support from the international community to maintain ISAF in its present form up to 20 December—and beyond, should the UN consider it necessary—I am content that we would not need NATO support for that particular operation.

Naval Bases

12. **Syd Rapson** (Portsmouth, North): If he will make a statement on partnering services at each naval base. [76704]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): New commercial partnering arrangements were introduced at the three naval bases at Devonport, Portsmouth and on the Clyde in September this year, under contracts awarded to Devonport Management Ltd., Fleet Support Ltd. and Babcock Naval Services. The new arrangements will deliver engineering support, waterfront services and logistics, estates and facilities management at each of the naval bases more efficiently and effectively, and at a lower cost to the taxpayer.

Syd Rapson: I thank the Minister for the sensitive way in which he personally intervened in the Portsmouth partnering services scheme, which smoothed the way tremendously. May I ask a question about cross-platform partnering services? Will there be any adverse effects on those services when the Defence Logistics Organisation reverts from a provider to a decider?

Mr. Ingram: I thank my hon. Friend for saying that I handled the matter sensitively—I will put that fact on my CV because it may come as a surprise to some people.

My hon. Friend has alighted on an important change in the delivery of DLO services to the front line. The DLO will move from being a provider to a decider organisation, and the pace of that change will depend on a number of factors. We do not expect to take a "one size fits all" approach to complex logistics support requirements. Our decisions will be driven by sound reasoning about what is best overall, taking into account the impact of changing arrangements and the benefits to be gained in effectiveness and efficiency. The change will inevitably have an impact on the civilian work force, but as a responsible employer we will always seek to look after the best interests of our civilian employees, just as we did when we made changes to naval base delivery.

Firefighting Training

13. **Mr. Hugo Swire** (East Devon): How many service personnel have been trained for firefighting duties. [76705]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): This deployment involves more than 19,000 service personnel from all three services. About 3,000 Royal Navy personnel, 7,700 Army personnel and 2,300 RAF personnel have been trained. A further 6,500 personnel will be engaged in administrative, security, command-and-control and other duties, drawing on normal armed forces skills and training.

Mr. Swire: Given the uncertain situation in Northern Ireland and the need to prepare for possible action in Iraq, as evidenced by the desertisation of two tank brigades in Germany, has the Minister assessed the loss of real training time caused by the need for firefighting training? How and when will that critical training be made up?

Mr. Ingram: That is an impossible question because we do not know whether there will be a strike. I understand that a decision is pending, but talks continue, and we all hope that they will lead to a resolution of the dispute. All efforts should be made towards that. As to the numbers that we have deployed in anticipation of a dispute over the next few months, there must be a knock-on effect for the training regime, and the longer the strike runs, the greater the effect will be. We must constantly review the situation; over time it will create problems for effective delivery and for other missions in which we may be called on to participate.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Will my right hon. Friend ignore Opposition calls for firefighters in the services to cross the Fire Brigades Union picket lines, and does he agree that if they did so it would only inflame an already serious situation?

Mr. Ingram: At this stage, that is a wise judgment. As we move, hopefully, towards a negotiated settlement, it is better to try to keep down the temperature of the dispute. Again, however, the question is impossible because we do not know the shape, format and length of the dispute and, therefore, the nature of our response.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): We can all understand that while negotiations continue between the Government and the union, it is tactful not to give service personnel access to the latest firefighting equipment available in the fire stations. Does the Minister accept, however, that in the interests of public safety there will come a point at which service personnel must be given access to the best equipment?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman makes an important recognition in saying that the decision is tactful, but, more than that, it is sensible. This is both a logistics issue and a training issue. I know that there is a

debate about how long it takes to train people, but we have committed large numbers of service personnel to the Green Goddess delivery system because of the short training required. If we decide to use sophisticated equipment for which longer training is needed, where will we get the personnel from? If we use the same pool of people, they will have to be taken out of service to be trained, so the logistics make it impractical to use that equipment. All these matters have to be kept under review, but there are no plans to do as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Putting the fire dispute to one side, does the Minister agree that it would be in the national interest if one or two regiments of the British Army were trained to use the sophisticated modern fire appliances to create a reservoir of trained personnel for firefighting and other emergency duties in a national emergency?

Mr. Ingram: No, I do not take the view that that is sensible because we do not want to appear as though we are always prepared, rather than forced, to participate. There is also the problem of skill fade. A sizeable number could be trained for an eventuality, but it is 25 years since the Green Goddesses were last called out. [*Interruption.*] I appreciate that we had to deploy them in regional strikes.

We would have to consider where the regiments would be based. It would also be unfair on the personnel who were trained as permanent firefighters because that is not why they joined the armed forces, irrespective of which branch they represent. Nevertheless, in terms of emergency support for the community, we always stand ready to meet that immediate demand if and when it arises.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The Minister will be aware that aid to the civil power role played by service personnel in areas with a large military presence, such as my own, is significant. What assessment has been made of the impact of firefighting duties on the operational role at bases including RAF Kinloss and RAF Lossiemouth? What assessment has the Ministry of Defence made of what would happen if the defence fire service is privatised should a similar problem or industrial action arise?

Mr. Ingram: As my right hon. Friend muttered to me, "Or if Scotland becomes independent." Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should explore his policy on the armed forces—out of NATO, out of the United Kingdom and out of many international coalitions. In those circumstances, defence personnel may have more time to participate in that activity in Scotland, but they are not there to do that; they are there to defend the realm.

There is an impact on operational capability as a consequence of firefighting duties. I have answered a number of parliamentary questions on that, including in response to the matter raised by the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire). I said that there is also an impact on training. There is no point in hiding that reality, which we continue to assess as the situation develops.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that I agree with him about not inflaming the industrial situation while negotiations continue? The Tories say that we should allow someone else to use the appliances, but the strike is not continuous. The firefighters will want to use the same appliances, which will be impossible after their eight days have concluded. Not only would the Tory approach inflame the situation: it would be practical nonsense as well.

Mr. Ingram: I tried to explain some of the practical difficulties that would arise from that approach. Hopefully my hon. Friend agrees with my assessment of that. I certainly tend to agree with his presentation of the problem.

Missile Defence

14. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): What discussions he has had with the United States Administration on missile defence since July. [76706]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I last discussed missile defence issues with the United States Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, at our meeting in Washington on 11 September of this year.

Richard Ottaway: The Secretary of State will be well aware of the huge amount of interest in the project and its relevance to our country's strategic defence. As his research is reaching an advanced stage, can he give an idea of which bases in the UK will be involved in the project and which of our European partners are on board?

Mr. Hoon: I set out the Government's position—clearly, I hope—to the House on 17 October. I said that there was not yet a specific request for any particular bases in the UK and that the Government would agree to such a request only if we were satisfied that the overall security of the UK and the alliance would be enhanced. The hon. Gentleman's question is premature. As I said, we propose to set out for the benefit of hon. Members and others the necessary technical and policy considerations before returning to the House for a further discussion on that subject.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Will my right hon. Friend say whether, before British taxpayers' money is committed to that vastly expensive, technologically dubious protection against something that the MOD has assessed as a remote threat, Parliament will be permitted to debate and vote on the issue?

Mr. Hoon: I said on 17 October that the House would have the opportunity to discuss the material I just mentioned, which is currently being prepared within the Ministry of Defence. That is as far as I am prepared to go at this stage.

Army Weapons

16. **Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): What recent assessment he has made of the reliability of British Army weapons. [76709]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): All weapons are continually assessed to ensure that they meet set reliability standards. If or when problems are reported, they are investigated immediately and action is taken as necessary.

Mr. Streeter: I thank the Minister for his reply. Is he aware that on recent exercises in Canada it was discovered that the Challenger 2 tank consistently broke down and there were difficulties with getting repairs and supplies, and that many of the men who rely on it for their lives have now lost confidence in that piece of equipment? What will he do about that, and will he assure the House that, before our tank regiments are sent into Iraq or anywhere else, they will have equipment on which they can rely?

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago. We have to learn the lessons that may emerge from any given training scenario. Saif Sareea is an example of an exercise on which we learned some extremely valuable lessons. That is the purpose of training exercises, followed by the search for solutions, and it is the best way to build confidence. The SA80 is a good example of the process: we discovered issues relating to the rifle that needed to be dealt with, and that is what we did. We will apply that across the board to all pieces of equipment that are crucial to our front-line activities.

Reservists (Call-up)

17. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If he will make a statement on his plans for call-up of reservists. [76710]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): As I said earlier today in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), a call-out order was made on 14 October 2002 in support of operations in Afghanistan and related operations against international terrorism. That was purely for the continuation of existing operations. In line with our policy since the strategic defence review, any substantial new operation would require support from reservists. That would be the subject of a separate call-out order at the appropriate time.

Mr. Dalyell: Given that this has been not exactly the most glorious week in the history of the royal prerogative, and given that for a precedent relating to my right hon. Friend's previous answer we have to go back to the Korean war, if there is to be a call-up of reservists would it not at least be wise to come to the House of Commons—regardless of the royal prerogative—to seek a substantive motion of agreement by the House to the call-up of reservists?

Mr. Hoon: As I said earlier when asked the same question, there is a well-established procedure in the House applying to the call-out of reserves, governed by an Act of Parliament. That requires the House to be informed in the usual way. My hon. Friend has long experience of the procedures of the House, so if he wants to debate the matter when the order is laid, he will, no doubt, find an opportunity to do so.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I wonder whether the Secretary of State will think again about his response. There is considerable doubt and concern about the possible purpose of recalling the reservists. The House needs to be properly informed and to have every opportunity to discuss any issue that might involve reserve personnel. I therefore ask the right hon. Gentleman to think again and to ensure that all of us have a proper chance to discuss that issue, which is not as open and closed as many in the past have been.

Mr. Hoon: To the best of my knowledge, the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Cabinet when the relevant Act of Parliament passed through the House—off the top of my head, I believe it was in 1996. Existing procedures are therefore the responsibility not only of the current Government, but of that previous Government. That legislation, which builds on previous practice both of Governments and of the House, is something with which the right hon. Gentleman is entirely familiar. The procedure is well-established and does not require to be changed at this stage.

Balkans

18. **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): If he will make a statement on operations in the Balkans. [76711]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): In response to the improved security situation in the Balkans, NATO is implementing significant changes to its peacekeeping forces. The United Kingdom will continue to play a significant part in peacekeeping operations through its contribution, which will include a battle group in Bosnia and a light-role battalion in Kosovo.

Mr. Randall: I thank the Minister for that reply.

As our commitment in the Balkans seems to be winding down in respect of regular forces, is the Minister's plan to use some of the reservists in a peacekeeping role?

Mr. Ingram: Already about 10 per cent. of those currently in use are reservists. The hon. Gentleman's question suggests that we are running down the numbers because of some other pressure point. That is not the case. It is sensible planning as we move the countries that make up the Balkans towards a more normal type of society. Clearly, the military presence would decline over time anyway, but use can be made of the Territorial Army in those circumstances. That is good for them and for the country.

Points of Order

David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it not be appropriate for the Solicitor-General to make a statement to the House about the case that collapsed last Friday? It is my view, shared by a number of colleagues, that there are relevant questions for Parliament to ask: why the case was started in the first place, why it collapsed and in what circumstances, and about all the costs involved. In all the circumstances, I should have hoped that the Solicitor-General would make a statement. I understand that the Prime Minister has answered questions outside Parliament. I do not criticise him for that, as he had a press conference. I hope, therefore, that the Solicitor-General will come to the House, if not today, then on Tuesday, to answer these relevant questions.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that the case of Paul Burrell has collapsed, in view of the fact that the case should not have proceeded to court if certain people had opened their mouth a lot sooner—I refer to members of the royal family—and in view of the fact that it will cost £1.5 million, should not the Queen have to foot the bill?

Mr. Speaker: In answer to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), that is not a matter for me. On the point of order from the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick), the Solicitor-General is a Minister of the Crown, and she can choose to come to the House and make a statement if she so wishes.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are about to move joyfully on to the Adoption and Children Bill. When that Bill was introduced to the House about a year ago, the Secretary of State for Health stated on the front of the Bill that it was compatible with the European convention on human rights. That Bill made no attempt to change the status of people eligible to adopt. Last week, the Joint Committee on Human Rights produced a report on the Bill that is coming back from the Lords today in its amended form, which we are about to debate. That amended Bill returns the Bill to its original form—that is, the status quo of people eligible to adopt. However, the report states that the Bill is now incompatible with the European convention on human rights. The Secretary of State and the Joint Committee cannot both be right. That casts a legal doubt on the compatibility of the Bill. Do you have a ruling on the subject, before we get into the nitty-gritty of the clauses that we shall be debating?

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance. Since the Joint Committee first considered the Bill as presented by the Secretary of State to the House on Second Reading, there has been a case in South Africa and there has also been European Court jurisprudence in the Fretté case, which was considered by the Joint Committee and which related to articles 8 and 14. If, following that jurisprudence, the Government now agree with the Joint Committee that the Bill in its current form is incompatible, is it not appropriate that there should be a Government amendment on the amendment paper making it compatible with the Human Rights Act, rather than the amendment before us, which is right and proper but relies on Back-Bench Members and Opposition parties to put the Bill in a human rights-compatible form?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for giving me notice of his point of order. The House is indebted to him for drawing attention to this apparent conflict of opinion, but it is a matter for a debate and not one that I can resolve or rule on.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During Defence questions, the Secretary of State referred to use of the royal prerogative for the call-out of reservists. Indeed, it might be used for military action as well. That has serious constitutional implications on which I ask you to reflect, especially with regard to whether we could have a debate on using the royal prerogative.

Mr. Speaker: It is not for the Speaker to worry about that.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In answer to the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the Secretary of State for Defence used the words "well-established procedure". May I, through you, ask the Clerks to identify that well-established procedure, because I suspect that it was used but once, at the time of the Korean war, by Herbert Morrison in trying to manipulate his colleagues? Could some research be done on the matter, because some of us think—[*Interruption.*] I did not refer to his grandson; I referred to Herbert Morrison. The sins of a grandfather should not be inflicted on a grandson. Perhaps the Clerks Department could do some research and find out what the well-established procedures actually are in relation to the royal prerogative and reservists.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me answer the Father of the House. I have noticed that he is a regular at getting advice from the Clerk of the House, so rather than me asking the Clerk for advice to give to him, perhaps he can go himself.

Mr. Gummer: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Gentleman is right in what he just said, I hope that the Chair will reflect—although no doubt it cannot rule on this point—on the fact that it would make the whole of the answer that the Secretary of State gave to me totally otiose.

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the main business.

ADOPTION AND CHILDREN BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 5)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order (28th June 2001),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Adoption and Children Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 29th October 2001, 23rd January 2002, 20th March 2002 and 16th May 2002:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) at Ten o'clock.

2. Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following Table and each part of the proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

Lords Amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Nos. 26, 32 to 36 and 66	8.30 p.m.
Nos. 1 to 25, 27 to 31, 37 to 65 and 67 to 107	10.00 p.m.

Subsequent stages

3. Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question put.

4. Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) one hour after their commencement.

—[Dan Norris.]

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Adoption and Children Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Mr. Speaker: I draw the attention of the House to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 1, 45 and 47, which are to be considered today. If the House agrees to these Lords amendments, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Clause 44

SUITABILITY OF ADOPTERS

Lords amendment: No. 26, in clause 44, page 27, line 38, after first "a" insert "married".

3.38 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 32 to 36 and 66 and motions to disagree thereto, and amendments (a) to (uu) in lieu thereof.

Mr. Hinchliffe: It is no surprise that we have returned to the topic with which the amendments deal. We had a lengthy debate on Report and, having studied in some detail the debate that occurred in the House of Lords, I take the view that the purpose of the original amendment was fundamentally misunderstood and misrepresented in another place. I should like to address my concerns about that misrepresentation of the purposes of the original amendment agreed to by this House.

I should like again to stress my personal strongly held belief in marriage. I do not want to cover ground that I covered in detail last time we debated the Bill, but I believe that if we had more marriage in society, we would have a much more stable society in which children are happier and perhaps stand a better chance in later life. Perhaps we as a society should spend more time considering how we support and promote marriage.

I shall set out the key objectives of the amendments. I believe that they will strengthen what is, in my view, an extremely good Bill. I pay tribute to the Minister for the way in which she has steered the measure through its various stages. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is very much behind the proposed legislation and wishes to assist the many children within the care system.

First, I want to see a good Bill strengthened so that more children within and from the care system are able to live in stable, permanent families. We know that about 5,000 children are in homes awaiting adoptive placements. I hope that the amendments will assist them in the process of obtaining a proper family life.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Has any estimate been made of the number of couples who will

come forward to adopt children as a consequence of the amendments but who are currently unwilling to adopt as individuals?

Mr. Hinchliffe: There was an adoption week in 1999. I understand that about 10 per cent. of the inquiries were from unmarried couples who were excluded from the adoption process. I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's question in detail, as I suspect he anticipated, but I know that in the past, unmarried couples have expressed a significant interest in adoption. That is why many of us feel that a significant number of children and adolescents within the care system could be assisted as a consequence of amending the Bill.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): Will my hon. Friend acknowledge the work of the Nottinghamshire Catholic Children's Society? It states in a note to me that recognition should be given to the potential family resource provided by unmarried couples. The society has worked in adoption for more than 25 years and has excellent experience. Will my hon. Friend acknowledge the veracity of the society's statement?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I have not seen that information, but it is significant that the society should come forward with such a statement. Some people with a Catholic belief have concerns about the appropriateness of what we seek to do. Many of my friends are Catholics, and they are divided. Some are strongly in support of the amendments' aims and objectives. They understand that the supporters do not wish to undermine the institution of marriage. We are about strengthening children's ability to engage in family life and to benefit from it in the way that most of us in the Chamber have done.

The amendments seek to widen the adoption pool. The available evidence shows that a significant number of people will be willing to come forward as unmarried partners to offer adoptive placements to children in the care system.

I am less happy about making the point that we need to relate legislation to the world in which we live. Within the House and elsewhere in wider society, apparently more and more people choose to live in long-term stable relationships without going through the marriage ceremony. I do not defend that necessarily, but I respect the fact that people have the right to take that course if they so wish. Many of my colleagues will be aware of a number of Members who have that form of relationship and who bring up children in stable partnerships without going through the marriage ceremony.

3.45 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Is not it true that, generally, adoption law is made every 25 years? Therefore, the measures that we put in place today need to reflect not only current society but how it will change and develop in the next 25 years. It is important to recognise changes in society now.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend is right. I cited figures in our previous debate to show that in 25 years, approximately 20 per cent. of couples will live together without going through a marriage ceremony. I do not defend that trend, but we must live in the real world and understand that, simply because people are not married, it does not mean that they cannot bring up children appropriately in stable relationships. If unmarried parents automatically meant instability, the child welfare organisations and social services would be more involved in removing children from such relationships.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): What is the hon. Gentleman's response to the statistic that 83 per cent. of cohabitations that do not become marriages break up in 10 years, whereas 60 per cent. of marriages last for life?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I do not want to argue about that figure. Unmarried applicants will go through a rigorous process to ensure that their relationship is stable. As I said in our previous debate, I have a background in adoption and guardian ad litem work. I know of cases of married couples who adopted children and whose marriages subsequently broke down. In many instances, that cannot be predicted. However, the adoption agencies and services have a good track record in examining the strengths or weaknesses of relationships. I shall return to that point, because it was raised in the Lords.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that a loving, stable relationship is required. Does he realise that, under current law, an individual could adopt, but that if that individual was in a stable relationship and, God forbid, one of the partners died, the child could be removed from the other adoptive parent? Is not that the cruellest aspect?

Mr. Hinchliffe: That is an important point, which several hon. Members made in our previous debate. In many cases, sometimes of same-sex couples but more frequently of unmarried heterosexual couples, one partner adopts the child. When the adoptive partner dies, the child is legally in a vulnerable position. That was discussed at length in our previous debate. It is an anomaly in the current law and we must bear it in mind, as the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) made clear.

The amendments to the Lords amendments secure the best interests of children by acknowledging that in some circumstances, they may be served by adoption by unmarried partners. Since 1989, the welfare principle has been at the heart of our legislation on child welfare. There will be general agreement in the House that it has served our children well. In any decision about their well-being, the prime objective must be their best interests throughout their lifetimes. In my view, the Bill as amended in the Lords will not ensure that those best interests are properly covered in specific circumstances.

I want to consider the main themes of the Lords' anxieties about the amendment that we passed some time ago. I hope that hon. Members have studied the relevant *Hansard* reports of the Lords proceedings. I do not like to say so, but one theme underpinned the debates: scarcely concealed, crude homophobia. I find that rather sad and worrying in this day and age.

On Report, my speech on the relevant amendment covered six columns of *Hansard*. Just two paragraphs of my speech dealt with same-sex adoption, because I believe that the main thrust of our concern should be child welfare, which is where the law has got it wrong.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: May I make a bit more progress?

Having read the *Hansard* reports, I am puzzled about why so-called gay adoptions dominated their lordships' concerns. It seemed that, for them, the issue boiled down to that one central element. I am reminded of a conversation that I had earlier this year with a recently ennobled Labour peer who entered the House of Lords after the last general election. He told me one evening that, over the year that he had been there, the entire place had seemed to be completely obsessed with sex. As far as he could see, all they ever talked about in the other place was sex. I do not want to go into why that might be so, but it seemed to underpin those debates and to divert attention from more important issues.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I think that the hon. Gentleman and I agree on a lot in respect of this aspect of the Bill. Does he acknowledge, however, that the Bill would be more acceptable, both in the other place and in the wider country, if we separated the concepts of unmarried couples of different sexes and couples of the same sex? We might thereby get greater acceptance for what we are trying to achieve.

Mr. Hinchliffe: It might be easier for Conservative Members to deal with the matter in that way. I very much respect the hon. Gentleman's position on this issue. We discussed the broad issues when he was on the Health Select Committee, and he was party to the Committee's inquiry into looked-after children, which reinforced the concerns about adoption. Politically, it might be helpful for the Conservatives to separate those two concepts, but I do not think that the distinctions are as clear as he suggests. The way forward is to accept the fact that we are dealing with unmarried partners, who may be heterosexual, homosexual or lesbian.

Another concern is that people automatically assume that same-sex adoptions will involve homosexuals or lesbians. I know people of the same sex who live together in long-term relationships and who would be offended if they were called homosexuals or lesbians.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that a child who is brought up by a couple of the same sex would automatically be denied either a father or a mother?

Mr. Hinchliffe: Perhaps I misheard the hon. Lady's question. There are many ideals in society. I worry that some of the people who end up in this place see society as being an ideal, and see their own background as one that applies to everyone else in society. Sadly, that is not the case. I know for a fact that vast numbers of children in the care system would find these debates irrelevant; all that they want is a loving home. It would not matter if the adopters were same-sex, mixed-sex, black, blue or green; those children want a loving family environment. That is where we must start from.

I was struck by some of the evidence advanced in defence of the Lords' concerns in their debate on same-sex adoptions. One peer referred to an opinion poll that had been carried out in a Labour constituency. The question that had been put to people—a fairly loaded one—was:

> "If you died would you like your children to be adopted by two homosexual men?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 884.]

In response, 81 per cent. of Tory voters, 71 per cent. of Labour voters, and 65 per cent. of Liberal Democrat voters said no. I wonder what the result would have been if the alternative had been proposed—of the children remaining in institutional care for the remainder of their childhood and adolescence, with numerous transient carers and, arguably, a far greater chance of abuse—because that, frankly, is the reality.

Jonathan Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that at least those Tory voters in that constituency had a chance to say what they really feel?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I want to stick to the issues, not be drawn into what may or may not be happening on the other side of the Chamber.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is generous in giving way again. Surely the point that he has just made goes to the heart of the matter. He says that the vast majority of cases involve heterosexual couples. All of them already have the power to adopt, and to adopt jointly, simply by getting married.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I very much respect the hon. Gentleman's commitment to adoption and the work that he has done. He deserves a great deal of credit for the efforts that he has put into this complex area and for pushing the Government on a number of fronts where there was a need for change. I credit him with a lot of achievement, but I disagree with him. When I met my wife, we determined to marry; we both chose to marry. I respect the fact that others may not choose the same course of action—

Jonathan Shaw: To marry you?

Mr. Hinchliffe: Okay, I shall have a word with my hon. Friend outside later.

The Lords' concern over same-sex relationships seems to be underpinned by the idea, which was not mentioned, that same-sex couples somehow present a greater risk of sexual abuse to children than heterosexuals. Having worked in social services for many years, I honestly am not sure that that is how it works out. That is not my experience as one who had to deal with—on few occasions, fortunately—children who had been abused in children's homes. By and large, that abuse was heterosexual. Certain myths are doing the rounds in the other place that perhaps underpin their lordships' misunderstanding of what we, I hope, will propose in the Commons.

The second area that concerns me, and which concerned me about the debate in the Chamber and in respect of the Lords in particular, is the general lack of knowledge of the thorough and skilled processes that are in place to deal with people who apply to adopt.

The peers do not seem to understand that there is an extremely thorough and complex process that leads to a large number of applicants being rooted out.

Angela Watkinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No, I have already given way to the hon. Lady.

Sometimes, applicants are very concerned about being deemed unsuitable to adopt—that happens.

I give an example that, in one sense, illustrates the ignorance involved. Interestingly, one peer referred to a British study that found that the incidence of child abuse is 33 times higher among children living with the mother and her boyfriend than it is among those living with biological married parents. How can anyone seriously translate and apply such findings on families with fleeting live-in boyfriends to the long-term stable relationships of unmarried partners, which will be strictly required of adoption applicants? I genuinely feel that the Lords fundamentally misunderstood the processes that occur before people are allowed to adopt.

The other area that came over loud and clear is political correctness.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No, I have given way several times, and many Members want to speak. I must make progress.

A great deal of reference was made to the Commons amendments being motivated by political correctness, and I addressed that point when we discussed the matter on Report. The Lords seem to have swallowed hook, line and sinker all the tabloid tales of so-called politically correct social work decisions in adoptions. I have looked at a number of those decisions and I have talked to directors of social services about particular examples that were brought to light by the tabloids. As those directors always say, confidentiality prevents agencies such as theirs from saying why particular applicants are turned down.

I give an example. Can the House imagine a director of social services telling *The Sun*, "No, Mr. X was turned down not as a Tory-voting smoker, but because medical reports from his GP show that he is being treated at a local genito-urinary medicine clinic for syphilis, which was picked up in his relationships with various sexual partners, unknown to his wife."?

That is the sort of stuff that occasionally emerges. Then we read in the tabloids that a person was turned down because he or she was a smoker, was too fat or was a Tory voter. We read all these stories, and sadly we may not be able to establish the truth; but it is not often to do with political correctness. Sound reasoning lies behind some of the decisions. I suspect that their lordships have fundamentally misunderstood the difficulties that may be involved in defending those decisions.

4 pm

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman made a distinction between a succession of transient live-in boyfriends and a long-term cohabiting couple. Would he care to go a little further, and say when he thinks a relationship should be deemed long-term? That is not in the amendments.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The Department of Health has issued fairly detailed guidance. "Two years" comes to mind, although the Minister is more familiar with the guidelines than I am. There is certainly a clear requirement in relation to the stability and longevity of relationships, which is why I believe that the existing system is strong enough to ensure that the amendments will work and will benefit children.

Another theme that came over loud and clear in the House of Lords was the suggestion that the House of Commons was engaging in social engineering in relation to gay relationships and unmarried partners. On 16 October, one peer said that my amendment would

"result in married couples losing their priority".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 896.]

Who is involved in social engineering? Should it not be the child about whom we are concerned? It seems to me that the House of Lords was focusing on the adoptive applicants rather than the children and their rights.

Their lordships also feared that our amendments would undermine Church-based adoption agencies. I was interested by what my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) said about the Catholic Society in support of the amendments.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): After the Nottinghamshire Catholic Society sent its letter, it gave evidence to the Select Committee; I think my hon. Friend was present. The woman giving evidence said that the society was actively reviewing the issue. It has clearly completed its review, as it has now stated that it does not think that the Bill ought to remain in its present state—as amended by the Lords—and that it should recognise the paramouncy of the needs of the children.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I recall that evidence. The Committee on which we both served heard significant evidence from other agencies suggesting that the Bill should be amended. There was broad support for the Bill, but there was concern about the whole issue of unmarried applicants.

I felt that the Lords failed completely to take seriously the welfare principle underpinning the Bill. That principle is, I think, the key to an understanding of why so many of us feel that our amendment must be restored. Their lordships presumably had other preoccupations; they did not appear to recognise that if their proposal were accepted, the best interests of a certain number of children—I will not say a significant number, but a certain number—would not be fulfilled.

I wonder how many of their lordships sat down with children in the care system and asked their views. I have done that, as have several other Members who are present now. Those children fully support the opportunities that would be given to them, and to many other children in care in the future, by our amendment.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): The founding principle of the Bill is that the child should be of paramount importance in the adoption process—not the parents or the adoptive parents, be they married, not

[Mr. Jonathan Djanogly]

married, heterosexual or, indeed, homosexual. I believe that the proposals to allow adoption by unmarried parents give the wrong answer to the basic question of how we can ensure that more children in need of adoption are adopted.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Djanogly: No, I am not going to give way yet. I shall give way later.

There are more than 50,000 children in care in our country. The problem is not the type of person who can adopt, but our culture of adoption. It is a question not of discrimination against unmarried couples, be they opposite or, indeed, same sex, but of what is best for the child. What will give the child the best chance in the society of today—not the society of the future or the society that some hon. Members would like to see—in which the child will be brought up?

Michael Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that today more than half of all couples under the age of 40 who live together are—rightly or wrongly—not married?

Mr. Djanogly: I appreciate that, but the incidence of adoption by such people is relatively small. Is the family with married parents still the most appropriate?

Jonathan Shaw: The hon. Gentleman mentions the evidence that was put before the Special Standing Committee, of which he and I were both members. Of the 30 organisations that presented evidence, 29 approved of the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). What evidence does the hon. Gentleman want? Is that not enough?

Mr. Djanogly: I am sure that all hon. Members present have received an enormous amount of documentation from any number of organisations that maintains that marriage is the best state for adoptive parents. However, I do not necessarily take the advice of professionals working in adoption as the be all and end all of what is right for society as a whole.

From my experience, I admit that sometimes personal circumstances—perhaps if a strong foster or other relationship already exists—can mean that it is correct that a person, whether single or gay, or an unmarried couple, should be entitled to adopt. That is what the existing law allows.

Ms Munn: The present adoption law does not entitle anybody to adopt: it entitles people to apply to adopt. The whole point is the need for a rigorous process to ensure that people are fit to be adoptive parents, regardless of their marital status.

Mr. Djanogly: The hon. Lady has hit on one of the problems with the system and I shall return to it later.

Some 95 per cent. of adopted children are placed with married couples, because of the way in which the law operates at present. We need to appreciate that the vast majority of adopted children are not adopted as babies. Even if it were acceptable that non-marrieds should regularly be able to adopt—which I do not accept—most adopted children will know, by reason of their age, that children normally have parents who are married and not of the same sex. Indeed, only 0.1 per cent. of households are same-sex households.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) made the point that half of all young couples are not married. Is the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) saying that in some way they are weird and that their children should be considered abnormal?

Mr. Djanogly: I certainly am not, and for the hon. Gentleman to make that suggestion is outrageous. [*Interruption.*] Indeed, it is weird.

Encouragement of non-married adoption will, according to many surveys that right hon. and hon. Members have received, increase the instability of an adopted child and create a stigma.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Djanogly: No, I am going to move on.

Surveys have proved that in such cases children will often keep the identity of their parents a secret, both at school and from their peers. Furthermore, as has been mentioned, couples who cohabit out of marriage are statistically almost twice as likely to separate as those who are married.

We must appreciate that different parts of the country will or may have different attitudes. That is reflected in the current system, in which most adoptions take place through local authorities. That means that elected, accountable representatives can dictate policy in the area of adoption.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): My hon. Friend's point about various parts of the country is important. Under the current arrangements, Cambridgeshire social services—my hon. Friend and I are both Cambridgeshire Members of Parliament—reports:

> "There remains a shortage of applicants interested and able to provide placements for older children and/or those children with special needs."

My worry is that I have not heard my hon. Friend say yet how he proposes that the system should change positively for the 25 children in the area who are waiting to find adoptive parents.

Mr. Djanogly: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point and I will come to it shortly. However, our allowing unmarried people and homosexual couples to adopt will not necessarily address his point. Just because homosexual couples can adopt, it does not follow that more people will want to adopt older children. My hon. Friend's point is valid but not particularly connected.

Some 85 per cent. of the population are against same-sex couples adopting, and 95 per cent. of children are adopted by married parents. To a great extent, that means that the current system represents what people want. The supporters of the motion to disagree with the

Lords' amendment would have us believe that, as the hon. Member for Wakefield said, non-married adoption is necessary to encourage adoptive parents to come forward and broaden the adoption pool. It could be argued that the proposals are the opposite of what is needed. Statistics show that there is no shortage of people who want to adopt. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) made the important point that it is a question not of who wants to adopt but of who is acceptable to the professionals.

Ms Munn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Djanogly: I shall just finish my point, if the hon. Lady will allow me.

Last year, only 4,000 children were adopted in this country, of whom only 3,100 came from the 50,000 children in care. The hon. Member for Wakefield said that 5,000 children out of that pool of 50,000 were waiting for adoption. I suggest that the figure should be much higher than 10 per cent.

4.15 pm

I further suggest that accepting the proposals will not widen the pool. We need a new culture of adoption. We need a culture that insists on clinics for adoption as much as on clinics for abortion; that does not discriminate against white parents adopting black children; that stops patronising and blocking the efforts of decent prospective parents; and that does not force them through a system that often demeans and intimidates them and delays applications.

When the BBC ran a programme on adoption, there were 19,000 inquiries during its first year and 24,000 in the second year. What happened to all those people? Initial research by the BBC showed that most of them seemed to have been put off by local authorities.

To those people who hold the interests of the child paramount, I say that the proposals to allow same-sex and non-married couples to adopt are misguided. They will not work in the best interests of the child and, importantly, they will miss the root cause of the problem that faces us.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): We must not allow the prejudice of those, however well-meaning, who oppose adoption by same-sex and unmarried couples to spoil the life chances of so many young people. We must always remember that the issue is not about the rights of potential parents but about the rights of young people languishing in care to be parented.

I acknowledge that the best option for bringing up children may be a man and a woman in a committed relationship, which will often mean marriage, but to suggest that marriage is the only relationship that will provide a satisfactory outcome is patent nonsense. I was brought up by my mother alone and although a father figure in the household might have been desirable—my mother always thought so—it is for others to judge whether she made a success of the venture.

In respect of the proposals, however, there is clearly prejudice against homosexuality, with the suggestion that same-sex couples are somehow damaging to the charges whom they seek to adopt. There is only one basis for such a belief. It is certainly not of the making of the individuals involved; it relates only to the prejudice created in society by some of those who oppose the provision—the homophobia that is so obvious in the other place.

Andrew Selous: Like the hon. Gentleman, I wholly abhor any form of homophobia; I want no truck with that. However, a Department of Health-funded study found that the average length of a close homosexual relationship is only 21 months. Is not that deeply worrying as regards the lifetime of commitment needed for a damaged child?

Mr. Foster: That is precisely why such couples are unlikely to succeed in an application. Surely, we must have some confidence in the professionals who make such judgments. It is not for us as Members of Parliament to take on that responsibility, but we must offer options. That is what the proposals do.

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Gentleman says that we should trust the professionals, but the whole reason for the framing of the Government's initiative—part of which is formed by the Bill—was because professional practice in a large number of local authorities was so completely dismal. Many of them failed to achieve even a 1 per cent. adoption rate for children in care.

Mr. Foster: That depends on the particular area. The record of my county, East Sussex, is relatively good. As hon. Members have pointed out, we do not know about the reasons for the refusal of adoption applications. There may be—and usually are—good reasons, but without knowing the facts, we cannot tell. I certainly do not agree that only adopters from the same ethnic background and so on should be considered, but that is a separate issue from the one that we are debating.

The bigotry against homosexuality and against couples who want to provide for young children has permeated throughout society because of what is being said. That has created prejudice that attaches not only to couples but to the charges whom they might want to take on.

It is true that many opponents acknowledge the right of individuals to live as they wish, but they simply consider that placing the precious lives of children in such a situation is wrong. I would go so far as to accept that, although this is not necessarily the case, the best chance of a successful adoption may be with a married couple including a mother and a father. That is in the main nature's way and, therefore, must have the greatest chance of success.

My wife Rosemary and I have two adopted sons, Damien and Luke, who have been a great joy to us. I hope that we have provided the stability in their lives that stereotype adopters can perhaps best and most easily provide. However, the issue is not who are the best adopters; this is not a competition, but a market. It is a fact that there are young people, many with disabilities and other challenges, who are not easily adoptable in terms of the stereotype husband and wife family, so if there are others who do feel the responsibility to take on more challenging youngsters, why should not the youngsters be given that opportunity?

[Mr. Foster]

We really must not allow the perceived best to become the enemy of the good. We all know that young people who spend their lives in residential care suffer significantly greater challenges in their adult life than others who are brought up in their natural homes or in adoptive relationships. The figures speak for themselves.

Of course it is not surprising that youngsters whom society has rejected, at least to the extent that no one wanted them as part of their families, reject society in turn. I ask those who oppose this humanitarian piece of legislation to search their conscience as to the reasons why they oppose it.

I understand the deep-seated religious conviction of some of my constituents, who have written to me about their belief that homosexuality and relationships outside wedlock are wrong, but, even if that is their belief, I would ask them two questions. Do they in all honesty believe that the damage to a child in being brought up in what is still today a non-orthodox family is more damaging than being brought up in residential care? Is being in a family that is not the norm more damaging than not being in a family at all?

We may be right or wrong that the wife-husband married partnership is the best option for the placement of a child in most circumstances, but, again, that is not the issue. The issue is, as I say, choosing between an orthodox family perhaps and none at all.

I do however believe that some of those who have written to me make the very good point—it was made a moment ago by the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier)—that, sometimes, children are denied the opportunity to join families because families from their ethnic or religious backgrounds cannot be found. That is wrong. I would tell the adoption authorities that exercise that sort of policy that they, like those who oppose the provision today, need to put the children first. In my view, the ability to love and nurture a child has little to do with one's colour, creed or, for that matter, sexual orientation.

In conclusion, I would add that the present provisions do not prevent children from being brought up in homosexual relationships, as has been stated already. A single person who is already permitted to adopt may well have a hidden same-sex or unmarried partner or acquire one subsequently and, even if discovered, that would not be grounds for unravelling an adoption or removing the child from the parent's care. The changes that I support simply provide for an open and honest assessment of the suitability of the individuals to adopt rather than a judgment of the individual's sexual orientation or marital preferences.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): We are at the eleventh hour on what is a really good Bill. We all want it to become law, and it must become law in the interests of many thousands of damaged children throughout our constituencies.

I very much appreciate the opening comments made in moving the motion by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). We may disagree about the motion, but he has always had a close interest in the Bill and given it very strong support in Committee, and I believe that he and I want the same result in the interests of many children. It is the means by which we reach that result on which we may differ, but no one should doubt our sincerity in jointly wanting to achieve it.

I also want to congratulate the Minister, particularly on many of the improvements that have been made in another place with Government support. Many of us and many people in the adoption world have long fought for the improvements on the retrospective disclosure of information, on fast-tracking for young babies, on advocacy services and on inter-country adoption. All those things have happened in the other place and have greatly improved the Bill, again, with cross-party support. The Minister is to be congratulated on the work that has been done to support that in this place and in the upper House. Many Members have worked very hard since October last year on this Bill, and for long before that on its forerunners. I am very proud of the part played by my team on the Committee, and I am grateful for the responsiveness of the Minister. The Bill has been improved by the proper processes of Parliament: through the good work and expertise of members of the Special Standing Committee, and through the expertise—and especially the legal input—of noble colleagues in another place.

The improvements that we achieved in the Bill gave greater emphasis to resources for adoption support services, which is essential, and I shall return to that later. It was improved, too, in terms of disclosure of information issues, proper monitoring of inter-country adoptions, the creation of special guardianship orders, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service support and overhauling the entire appeal system and court procedures on placement. The fact is, however, that the amendments under discussion are neither relevant to nor contingent on any of the improvements that have been added to the Bill, yet we are in danger of getting hung up on the single ancillary issue of unmarried adoption, which now threatens to wreck the Bill or even lead to losing it. What a disservice that will be to thousands of children who are desperately looking for homes.

This is a contentious issue—none of us would deny that. Whatever our side of the argument, we can all admit that the unmarried status issue is contentious, yet it is not fundamental to the Bill. It was not in the original Bill on Second Reading, the Prime Minister's adoption review, the White Paper on adoption or a Government manifesto commitment.

Kevin Brennan: If the amendment is not fundamental to the Bill, and if it is a contentious issue—and for many Members an issue of conscience—why is a three-line Whip being imposed on the Opposition?

Tim Loughton: I will explain why we need to separate these issues, because, as far as we are concerned—as I said just now—the whole Bill is about the welfare of the child and the rights of the child. It is not about the rights of adopters of any shape or size—

Ms Munn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: If the hon. Lady will allow me, I shall answer one intervention at a time.

We are in danger of confusing the two issues—I have referred previously to the provision being hijacked—and it is in the interests of pushing the Bill through, with all the good additions to it in the interests of children, that they are kept separate. That is why we are pushing for the three-line Whip to oppose the objections to the amendments.

Ms Munn: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that far too many children who are currently waiting for adopters are unlikely to be able to be placed with adopters? If so, will he tell the House what other clauses in the Bill will significantly increase the number of prospective adopters who are interested in taking on children who desperately need homes?

Tim Loughton: I shall address precisely that point. These amendments, of course, do not necessarily add prospective adopters—indeed, new prospective adopters may be vying for the very same prospective adoptee children.

Jonathan Shaw *rose—*

Tim Loughton: I shall give way once more, and then I would like to make some progress, as, otherwise, we may be here for a long time.

Jonathan Shaw: The hon. Gentleman said that the amendment was not in the original Bill, but does he agree that one of the purposes of having a Special Standing Committee is to weigh up all the evidence and listen to all those involved in the adoption process? As I said previously, 29 of the 30 agencies, which are of different persuasions, agreed with the proposals. The hon. Gentleman uttered not one word on the issue during the debate in Standing Committee.

4.30 pm

Tim Loughton: If the purpose of the Special Standing Committee was to inform the debate, which it essentially was, and if the evidence in one direction was so overwhelming, one can ask why the Government have not adopted the recommendations and why the amendments, which are again having to be moved by Back Benchers, are not Government amendments. The Government do not have a line on this policy, so the hon. Gentleman could direct his question to his Front-Bench colleagues.

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): I want to press my hon. Friend on this point because he began his speech by referring to the sincerity of Members who have contributed to the debate. I thought that sincerity shone out of the speeches by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), and that is what makes this a remarkable debate and a great House of Commons occasion. Does my hon. Friend remember, on the last day of the Conservative party conference, hearing a speech that included the statement:

"We must first understand the way life in Britain is lived today, and not the way it was lived twenty years ago"?

Given that sentiment and the range of sincere opinions, will my hon. Friend return to the reason for the three-line whip?

Tim Loughton: I do not disagree with my right hon. Friend's remarks. If he will give me the opportunity to shine out, I will tell him exactly why we are separating the subjects of debate and why the line that we are taking is centred exclusively on the welfare of children, not on the supposed rights of potential adopters of any description.

I ask the House, in the interests of the Bill, to put to one side the issue of unmarried adopters, with the prospect of having plenty of ways to revisit it and debate it on its merits in other legislation, perhaps as part of a review of civil registration of relationships, to which I shall return in a moment.

Let me set down some markers. We have all agreed that we want the Bill, and we want to increase the number of people who come forward as potential adopters and the number of those who become adoptive parents. There is some confusion about the figures, but I believe that 3,100 looked-after children were adopted last year. This year, the figure is likely to increase to 3,800, and we seem to be well on the way to hitting the target of 5,000 and to achieving the increase of at least 40 per cent. which was requested by the Government and to which we all agreed.

We all—perhaps, given his comments on Report, with the exception of the Liberal Democrat health spokesman—accept that in an ideal world a mother and father figure is best, although not always achievable and not always entirely appropriate when dealing with certain very damaged children. We need to pay special attention to ensure that adoptive placements have as high a chance as possible of being a stable environment to give damaged children a second chance. The state usually makes a poor parent, but it has an obligation to make sure that looked-after children have the best chance of a stable upbringing.

No one is suggesting that we should move backwards from the status quo of married and single people qualifying for adoption, as set down in the 1967 convention to which we are still a signatory and the Adoption Act 1976. It is already permissible for single people, regardless of their sexuality or partnership arrangements, to adopt where they are deemed suitable on their own merits.

Mr. Dawson: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument and I respect his commitment to the needs of children, but how can he argue that it is desirable for one member of a couple to adopt a child but not two members of that partnership? How can that be in the interests of stability or the best future for children?

Tim Loughton: I am not going over the figures on stability again, but as it stands unmarried couples do not have a legal entity. The thrust of my argument is that we are pre-empting a debate on, and changes to, legislation that gives them a degree of legal entity. That is a strong point to consider.

Clause I sets out that the interests and the welfare of the child are paramount. The only rights we are talking about are those of damaged children to expect a decent

[Tim Loughton]

opportunity for a second chance of growing up in a decent and stable family environment, and those of birth parents to expect proper due processes under the law. That was the intention and detail of the Bill first proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) when she introduced her Adoption Bill in the last Parliament. As I think we have all agreed, however, there is no such thing as a right to adopt. I would gladly participate in a debate on the status of unmarried people, but that is for another day and another piece of legislation.

Liz Blackman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: I want to make a little progress first because I have given way many times.

Conservatives subscribe to all the above and have supported the Bill throughout. I remind the House that we are here because of a vote in another place by Conservative peers with the cross-party alliance of 23 Labour peers, 46 Cross-Benchers, two Ulster Unionists, two bishops and three others. A total of 196 peers voted for the amendments with just seven Conservative peers voting against.

Regardless of their views, however, Members of the upper House had other reasons for which they were even more entitled to object to the legislation. The measure was not in the original Bill. It was changed by Back-Bench amendments and the Government have not yet shown their hand, although on past form Health Ministers have voted to back the amendments. Those amendments contravene the 1967 convention on adoption. The Government have given no sign that they want to rescind our membership of that or renegotiate its terms for everyone. We have all been labouring under the misconception that the Government are reviewing civil partnership law, including related adoption issues, and that nothing will be done to prejudge or circumvent that. In essence, the Lords voted to return the Bill to the status quo, which the Government had not said it was their intention to change.

Much rubbish has been spouted in the press about the Bill, none more so, perhaps, than a highly ill-informed piece in *The Times* last month by Mary Ann Sieghart which lambasted Conservatives for opposing the expansion of the right to adopt. That article fundamentally misunderstood the nature of adoption. There is no such thing as a right to adopt. I have no right under any article of European convention or any personal moral code to expect to take over responsibility and control of another human being's life in the same way that I can expect to exercise my right to vote or to have my private and family life respected. It is not a matter of opposing the change out of a bizarre wish to condemn more children to languish in care in the name of family values, as Ms Sieghart absurdly puts it. But to suggest in isolation that simply not enough prospective adopters are coming forward and that the only way to expand the pool enormously is to change the main criteria, is patently to ignore reality and the facts.

I want to address the real issues that arose from deliberations in this House and another place on the status of unmarried adopters. I want to consider widening the pool, the current obstructions to adoption inherent in the system and the legal implications of moving from marriage as a benchmark in law to a system of flat equality. That will lead me on to the Joint Committee on Human Rights before dealing with the interesting point raised by the noble Lord Alli in another place.

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is being generous in giving way. Does he accept that there is agreement throughout the House that the issue has nothing to do with the right to adopt, but that his position has everything to do with denying certain individuals the right to apply to adopt?

Tim Loughton: The hon. Gentleman knows that people already have the right to apply; it is the form of assessment that is to be debated.

To return to the categories I have just outlined, I do not want to get bogged down in trading statistics and dubious research. I start from the premise that although marriage is not a dead cert, by all accounts it offers the best probability of a stable home for an adopted child. Adoption can often be worse than care if it breaks down—we are not dealing with a one-way street. Furthermore, my remarks are based on the rough premise presented by the figures from the Office for National Statistics: that cohabiting couples are more likely—by whatever margin we care to state—to split up.

I agree with the words spoken by the current Foreign Secretary when he was Home Secretary:

> "Children in my judgment, and I think it's the judgment of almost everyone including single parents, are best brought up where you have two natural parents in a stable relationship."

The Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), said in the Special Standing Committee:

> "The adoption law review, when considering this issue, concluded that joint adoption should remain limited to married couples on the grounds that adoption by a married couple was more likely to provide the stability and security that the child needed because married couples have made a joint, publicly recognised, legal commitment to each other . . . There is no provision in law to protect the child's interests when unmarried couples separate."—[*Official Report, Special Standing Committee*, 29 November 2001; c. 383.]

Mr. Lansley: On the question of the stability of an adoption placement, I should like to put the following point to my hon. Friend. Although I do not disagree with him about the general proposition that married circumstances offer children a better home, success depends on the individual decisions on placement and the characteristics of the home. Given that 95 per cent. of current adoption placements are with married couples, 20 per cent., on average, will end in disruption. What is critical is the ability to find lasting, permanent, loving homes for children.

Tim Loughton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. No adoption relationship can be guaranteed to be perfect, whether the adoption is made by a married couple or by a single person who is in some form of unmarried relationship. Nothing is foolproof. What we

have to explore is how to make the whole system more likely to work. That is what the Bill is really about, but it is being ignored because of the side issue.

On the question of how to widen the pool, there is some confusion about whether enough people are coming forward to adopt, as the numbers of those applying to become adoptive parents are slanted towards the shiny babies—the relatively problem-free young children, rather than the older, problem children. There is no evidence that non-married couples are better equipped to take on children with complex problems. In any case, as the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) said in previous debates, there is no queue of unmarried couples waiting to become adoptive parents. Our first objective should be to steer existing applicants toward more challenging problem children.

Ms Munn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: I have given way a lot, and I want to make progress, so I will not give way to the hon. Lady; otherwise, people will complain that they were unable to speak in the debate.

The people most likely to adopt problem children are surely those who are already putting themselves forward as prospective adopters. Our second objective must be to recruit prospective adopters from under-represented groups, especially ethnic minorities, from whom far more prospective adopters are needed. Our third and biggest objective must be to expand the pool from those who are currently able to adopt—married couples.

Ms Munn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

4.45 pm

Tim Loughton: I shall not give way. I will make some progress and give way later.

Currently, about 3,100 children a year are adopted. It is said that at least 5,000 children a year need to be adopted, so there is a shortfall—these are very rough figures—of 1,900. If more children have been adopted this year, that figure will be lower. In this country at the moment there are 11 million married couples. So we need 1,900 couples to adopt one of those children each. Even if there is a rejection rate on the ground of suitability of something like 90 per cent., one in 10 people who come forward will end up adopting a child. I do not believe that the rejection rate is anything like that, but even if it were, we would need 19,000 married couples to offer to adopt. That represents 0.17 per cent. of the entire married couples pool in the country at the moment. Indeed, we are not short of new raw material, as 268.000 marriages occurred last year and for once we are seeing a slight increase in the number of people marrying.

One of the largest increases in a group of the population has been in the number of single people living alone. There are forecasts of increases in the number of single men from 7.1 million to 8.5 million, and in the number of single women from 5.8 million to 7 million over the next 10 years. So there is no potential for a numbers problem. There may be such potential in the numbers coming through at the moment, but the pool is vast enough as it is.

Are we seriously saying that we cannot widen the pool of potential adopters across the spectrum, from shiny new babies to behaviourally challenged teenagers, and that we are not confident enough of improving the strike rate of 99.83 per cent. of married couples who do not end up adopting without changing the qualifications criteria to open up the pool to unmarried couples? Does that not suggest that we have completely and utterly wasted our time on this Bill over the past year? Are we really saying that improvements in adoption support services, special guardianship orders, the adopted children register, the streamlining of court procedures on placements and the overhauling of the appeals system count for nothing? I do not believe that for a minute. I have rather more faith in this Bill than Labour Members appear to suggest by concentrating on just this one item.

Mr. Brazier: My hon. Friend is making a powerful point by listing those measures. It is a shame, though, that there is not one more measure, which he proposed but which, sadly, was voted down by the Government: to water down the still very strong requirement for an ethnic match, which is one of the strongest barriers to adoption.

Tim Loughton: I will not be churlish by saying what is not in the Bill, because we have an awful lot. However, there are many things on which we still need improvement, as my hon. Friend has said.

I want to consider obstructions to adoption and why more people are not coming forward and ending up as adoptive parents. Despite some improvements, it is clear, as Lord Hunt said in another place, that

> "Many of the problems that we currently face with the shortage of adoptive parents stem from the number of hurdles that they have to go through, which can lead them to becoming discouraged and finding the process very off-putting."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 December 0200; Vol. 620, c. 843.]

I agree.

The evaluation carried out by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering during adoption week in 1999 stated:

> "The most frequently asked question was about the length of time it takes to be approved. Many expressed concern and fears about the process taking many years and being very gruelling, highly intrusive and upsetting."

BAAF identified a need for reassurance from agencies and for ease of contacting such agencies and getting information. It indicated a lack of responsiveness from some social services departments, and staff shortages that led to the closure of waiting lists for assessments.

The evaluation also noted a big differential in adoption rates around the country—ranging from 2 per cent. to 10 per cent. in different local authorities. It is clear that adoption is a relatively small-scale activity in many social services departments. Hopefully, the adoption register and better provision for funding trans-authority placements and support services should help to diminish those geographical disparities.

There has also been a big drop-out rate owing to problems in coping with the possibility of contact arrangements between children and birth families. Again, there are measures in the Bill to alleviate that problem. The BAAF also identified a shortage of

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personnel for home study assessments, which can drag on for years, and poor administration and non-availability of police checks. We all know about the current problems with the Criminal Records Bureau.

"Be My Parent" is the paper produced by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, and features children available for adoption. When we see that there have been no inquiries about some of the children, we start to ask why. I pick out one or two examples from this publication. The details provided about the children include details of their ethnic descent. I have no objection to that, but under the heading "family needed", ethnic requirements are specified as well. In the case of a young boy, we read that the ethnic descent is white English, and that the family needed is a white adoptive family. In another case, the child is described as being of Afro-Caribbean Jamaican ethnic descent, and needing a black adoptive family. In a further example, the ethnic descent is given as Afro-Caribbean, and the family needed is described as an Afro-Caribbean two-parent adoptive family. Under "Contacts", the paper states that direct contact is planned with the maternal grandmother and half-sister, as well as letterbox contact with the birth parents.

It strikes me that some of those requirements, set down by I know not whom, are extremely prescriptive and make it very difficult for the right potential adopters to apply or signal an interest in such children. That is part of the problems and obstructions.

Ms Munn: Is it not right that people trying to find adoptive homes for children should seek out the best home that they can, as has been argued? It is right to try to match a child's ethnicity, but it is not right to hold out for a long time for the correct match. To try to meet the child's need in the best way first is absolutely the right thing to do.

Tim Loughton: But on what grounds can the hon. Lady judge that she or I are not equally suitable to adopt one of those young children who are described as requiring somebody of Afro-Caribbean descent to adopt them? It is yet another obstruction.

Ms Munn *rose—*

Tim Loughton: No. I shall make progress. Clearly, many attitudes and stereotypes of matching parents with children need to change. Hopefully, that will change under the terms of the Bill.

I shall deal now with the legal minefield. In November last year, the Minister said in Committee:

"Adoption by unmarried couples would raise several complex legal questions ... It would be difficult and inappropriate to pre-empt the conclusions of the review"—[*Official Report, Special Standing Committee*, 29 November 2001; c. 384-85.]

—that is, the civil partnerships review. We all agreed with that. In Committee, she offered to refer adoptions to the Cabinet Office-led review of civil partnerships, which she did. That committee has not reported yet.

In a statement in another place two weeks ago, Lord Hunt said:

"Work is going on in government to carry out an investigation into the implications of establishing a partnership registration scheme. It is presently comprised of cross-departmental work. The Cabinet Office is leading in terms of following up the issues identified. I cannot give a date as regards the conclusions of the review, but work is under way."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 917.]

It seems that confusion reigns. As my parliamentary question on the progress of the review revealed last week, it has been transferred from the Cabinet Office to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, so it is unclear who is leading the review. Amendments to the Bill would mean that adoption has been singled out to be fast-tracked and would circumvent the civil partnerships review.

With reference to the 24th report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which was published last week, I said earlier that the Joint Committee and the Secretary of State could not both be right about the human rights compatibility of the status quo, whereby adoption is available only to married couples and single people. It is odd that the ninth report of that Committee stated that the original Bill—the form to which the Lords have returned the present Bill—is compatible.

There is great legal confusion. The Bill did not raise questions relating to human rights that require to be drawn to the attention of each House. That is what the Committee said on 17 December 2001. What has changed in the meantime? Certainly, the membership of the Committee has not changed. The point is that its 24th report is only an opinion. It will carry no weight in law until it is challenged by the courts, yet the status quo before the Bill's introduction was not challenged in the UK courts.

Dr. Evan Harris: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. His first question requires answering. The answer given in the report is that, after the publication of the earlier report, the case of Fretté was dealt with by the European Court of Human Rights. The court found by a majority of four to three that articles 8 and 14 of the European convention on human rights were engaged by the question of the right of unmarried couples to adopt. The further judgment went the other way, but the key point is that there is now jurisprudence to show for the first time that the Human Rights Act 1998 is engaged on the question. In addition, a case arose in South Africa—it also did so between the publication of the two reports—that is relevant to our interpretation of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

Tim Loughton: If the hon. Gentleman is patient, I shall mention briefly both the case of Fretté and the de Vos case in South Africa.

People can take many different legal opinions on the report, which is not helped by factual errors. It dismisses the Fretté *v.* France case in fairly curt terms. Page 10 refers to a lesbian couple who were refused their challenge to adopt. In fact, Philippe Fretté, the applicant, was a homosexual man who was refused an

application for authorisation to adopt by the Paris social services department in May 1993 on the grounds that the applicant

"had no stable maternal role model"

to offer, and had

"difficulties in envisaging the practical consequences of the upheaval occasioned by the arrival of a child."

I shall make no comment on that ruling, other than that the finding was upheld by the European Court of Human Rights as recently as February 2002. The court held that there was no right to adopt, and that, accordingly, the state was entitled to draw distinctions between homosexuals and others in the adoption process. Without venturing an opinion, I remind the House that the convention specifically allows state interference in private and family life for moral reasons. The issue of morals falls squarely within the UK's margin of appreciation and democratic process, which both domestic and international courts will respect.

The report also sets great store by a recent South African case that the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) mentioned—that of du Toit and de Vos *v.* the Minister for Welfare in South Africa. First, however, South Africa has a vastly bigger problem in terms of a shortage of adopters to match the many orphan children. Secondly, I am led to believe that homosexual rights are specifically enshrined in the South African constitution. The case therefore comes from a very different base, so it is offered at best as a piece of persuasive authority; but I feel that too much of the report reads as advocacy for a cause rather than objective interpretation. It also makes no mention of the European convention on the adoption of children, which was agreed to in 1967 and to which we are still a signatory. Article 6 of that convention limits application to married couples and single people. Have the Government initiated a renegotiation of the terms of the 1967 convention, or are they looking to rescind membership?

Finally, on the legal process, I should like to mention Lord Alli's interesting and thoughtful intervention in the House of Lords. At column 874, he said:

"I happily agree with many noble Lords that married couples should have priority over unmarried couples. I also agree that unmarried couples should have priority over gay couples."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 874.]

Many hon. Members will have sympathy with that view, yet Lord Hunt specifically ruled out such a possibility in July 2002. In any case, legal opinion suggests that such an approach would certainly fall foul of the Human Rights Act 1998 in the UK courts, rather than in Strasbourg. Once marriage is removed as the benchmark for adoption, there will be no midway compromise.

I remind hon. Members that marriage is defined in the European convention on human rights as marriage between a male and a female. Lord Hooson made an interesting contribution to the debate on the report, in which he referred to the

"danger of the Bill creating a platform of legal equivalents".

He went on to say:

"There is a serious problem if it is not spelled out in the Bill that we in this House and indeed elsewhere in the country do not regard these concepts as legal equivalents."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 899.]

That came from someone who sympathises with adoption by unmarried couples but realises that the proposals, if added to the Bill, would risk a great deal of future trouble. If the amendments are passed, there can be no middle way and no preferences.

5 pm

Some will say that everything can be sorted out, in the shape of the adopter assessments on which there is now consultation. We do not know, because the Government started the consultation process only last month on what the assessment procedures should look like. There is no basis on which to take reassurance from the unknown outcome. How will an enduring unmarried relationship be defined? Enduring means something less than life long. If the relationship were any longer, those involved would surely be dead. It is also not clear from the consultation exercise whether the forms to be completed for applying to become adoptive parents even contain a question about marital status.

There are views in some quarters that the proposed change could lead to a postcode lottery in adoption, with some adoption services operating a proactive equality policy and actively looking for unmarried couples to make up the numbers, rather than relying solely on individual merits. Under the Bill, with these proposals, it would not be open to a mother to object to proposed adopters on the ground that they were unmarried. More interestingly, there is another potential source of challenge to the proposed legislation from an unlikely source—children themselves. There is a legal view that it is arguable that article 8 implies the right for a child to have a mother and a father, and that right may be violated if an adoption order is granted to two parents of the same sex.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is to be congratulated because he has made a truly excellent speech, and that is because he speaks in line with his conscience. I ask him to consider for a moment what the position would be if he found himself in a minority in his party. Would he feel happy if, to vote with his conscience, he had to give up his Front-Bench position? How would he feel about that?

Tim Loughton: I am trying to deal with the substance of the issues that we are debating. I have tried to separate entirely the issue of the child's welfare. I have spent the past 12 months concentrating on the Bill with colleagues, who appeared at every sitting of the Committee and on every occasion when we have debated the measure in this place. We have shown an interest on all aspects of the 140-odd clauses in the Bill.

Liz Blackman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: I am trying to answer the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo).

If I thought that there was a middle way in some instances, I might want to entertain the idea of giving someone a preference, or whatever. However, as I have laid out clearly, there is no middle way. In the interests

[Tim Loughton]

of children and in the interests of avoiding all the legal wrangles, it is right that we promote our objections to the amendments.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: No. I shall finish so that hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber can have their say.

This is not a straightforward matter. There are differing personal views about the suitability of who adopts, and the proposed changes are a legal minefield, with differing legal opinions based on differing and inconclusive research. Yet all this is completely incidental and academic as regards the fundamental reforms to, and improvements of, adoption that are represented by an excellent Bill. Failure to disengage from the arguments and to put them on one side for another day threatens the safe passage of the Bill, thereby sacrificing the chances of thousands of damaged children having a second chance.

The proposals to reject the amendments are uncertain in law. They would pre-empt the review of civil relationship registration. They would go against the 1967 convention, without any proposals to reform or rescind it. They would pre-empt the adoption assessment process consultation, which has only just started. They would ignore the progress that has already been made, which will be boosted substantially by the bulk of the Bill's provisions in encouraging more than 11 million married couples to come forward.

We are not considering Government amendments; there is therefore no shame in or problem with the Government's declining to support them, especially in view of all the reviews. We are looking only to return to the status quo of the Government's original Bill.

Another day should be allocated for sympathetic debates about the rights of unmarried couples, gay or otherwise, and many Conservative Members will want to participate enthusiastically in them. However, today is the day for promoting the rights of damaged children to a decent second chance in life. We must concentrate on genuinely putting the welfare and interests of children at the heart of the Bill. I therefore call on all hon. Members, whatever their personal views, to reject, in the interests of the Bill, the proposal to disagree with the Lords amendments.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I call Jonathan Shaw.

Jonathan Shaw: Thank you, Mrs.—

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Thank you, Mrs.?

Jonathan Shaw: Oh dear, I shall have to put that in my diary. I am sorry; I meant to say, "Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker".

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) described the subject of our discussion as a side issue. He characterised widening the pool as a side issue. If so, why are Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen resigning? Why are other members of the shadow Cabinet being given leave of absence so that they do not have to vote on the matter? Why are former contenders for the Conservative party leadership attacking the fact that the party is not allowing a free vote? If it is a side issue, goodness help the hon. Gentleman when a genuine issue jumps up and bites him.

We are considering a genuine issue that affects children: widening the pool and providing greater opportunities for children who languish in care. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham accused other hon. Members of bandying statistics and proceeded to bandy many statistics himself. He mentioned the 1,900 people who need to come forward. In discussing widening the pool, we need to consider the sort of children for whom they are required come forward. They are not the shining babies to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but older children, who are often boys.

The British Association for Fostering and Adoption today released figures that show that 1,255 inquiries were made for 430 children in the March 2002 issue of *Be My Parent*. However, for 129 children, there was not a single inquirer. Those children were boys. When we talk about getting more people to adopt children, we must recognise that those children are difficult boys, who have been physically and sexually abused, and manifest difficult behaviour that requires special people to deal with it.

An unmarried foster couple might be looking after one of those damaged, abused boys. The amendment would deny them the ability to apply to adopt jointly. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham and the Lords would deny such children the opportunity for a loving, stable relationship.

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Gentleman speaks with passion and knowledge, as always. However, the issue is surely not the right to adopt but the best interests of the child. All that the law asks in the best interests of the child is that the couple get married before they adopt.

Jonathan Shaw: Gay people cannot marry. We are not considering the right to adopt. Surely it is right that the institutions and Parliament do everything possible to ensure children's right to an opportunity for a loving family. No Labour Member who supports my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) claims that people have the right to adopt. We are considering the child's right to the best possible opportunity because the child's needs are paramount. That principle underpins all child care legislation. Those who support the amendments are arguing for that.

Liz Blackman: If we consider the welfare of the child to be paramount, should not a child's right to have a legal relationship with both adoptive parents be central to that welfare?

Jonathan Shaw: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That point was also made earlier by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant). If a child is adopted

by an unmarried couple, and the adoptive parent dies, the child has to go through the whole process again. Is that in the interests of the child? Of course it is not.

Ms Dari Taylor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way; he is very generous. Would he say that my loving, caring commitment to my child is a consequence of my marriage vows, or that it comes from my being naturally loving and caring, and has nothing to do with those vows at all?

Jonathan Shaw: My hon. Friend is indeed a loving and caring person. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I am doing well at the moment. I have called Madam Deputy Speaker "Mrs." and now I have described my hon. Friend as loving and caring.

My hon. Friend would have been assessed on her ability to provide a stable relationship for her children. That is the basis on which all people are assessed. We cannot be the adoption panel. We should not talk about generalities. We need to talk about specifics, such as those difficult-to-place boys. The adoption panel makes the decisions in those cases, through rigorous assessment.

Mr. Djanogly: No one here queries the statistics that say that the rate of divorce among unmarried couples is significantly—two or three times—higher than among married couples. That being the case, why should not one parent in an unmarried couple have to take responsibility?

Jonathan Shaw: The hon. Gentleman sat through the proceedings in Committee, as did I. As I said earlier, 29 out of the 30 agencies that gave evidence to us—

Mr. Djanogly: Are we going back to that again?

Jonathan Shaw: We are going back to that again. Those agencies came from right across the child care spectrum. They were not all left-wing child care agencies. We asked them time and again whether these measures would widen the pool, and whether they supported the idea of unmarried couples being able jointly to adopt. And they did. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham quoted the Minister, prior to the amendments previously tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield. My hon. Friend listened to the debate, and was persuaded by the arguments. That is Parliament's role, and Back Benchers have tabled amendments because we believe that the case presented to us was correct. Does not that enhance the Bill and the House of Commons? Of course it does. A charge often levelled by the Conservatives is that the Government ignore the Commons. Now, when Back Benchers have an opportunity to table amendments, which the Government support, they attack my hon. Friend.

Kevin Brennan: *Hansard* will no doubt record the intervention of the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), in which he asserted that the rate of divorce among unmarried couples—think about that for a moment—was higher than among married couples. Does not that show the terminal confusion of the hon. Gentleman in relation to this whole issue?

5.15 pm

Jonathan Shaw: I suspect that it is one of the better points that the hon. Gentleman made.

Ms Munn: Did not Professor Tresiliotis, who is probably the foremost adoption expert in this country, make the point very clear when he appeared before the Committee by saying that the marital status of the person adopting has absolutely nothing to do with their suitability to provide a home for a child?

Jonathan Shaw: My hon. Friend has made her point.

Children do not choose their parents, but many find themselves in such circumstances that they have a life in care. I worked with children, as I was a social worker for 10 years.

Tim Loughton: Not that one again.

Jonathan Shaw: That one again—absolutely.

I recall attending numerous placement meetings where children were waiting for prospective adopters, but one has to say that, too often, no one had come forward or made inquiries about becoming their parent, because the children were those to whom I referred earlier—the older children who were abused and who manifested behaviour problems. We have a once in a generation opportunity to change the law. We began the process in October last year, and we have that opportunity to get it right. I have no problem with the delay, as long as we get it right.

I support all the agencies that gave evidence before our Special Standing Committee, which was one of the most stimulating processes in which I have been involved in my five years in the House of Commons. It was indeed a learning exercise, and we can reach only one conclusion: we need to widen the pool and provide more opportunity for the children I have spoken about to have a loving family. Whether that is provided by a married couple, unmarried people or people of the same or of different sex, we should not be the judge. We cannot be the adoption panel, as the adoption panels in our constituencies have that specific remit. It is for them to judge whether a particular couple meet the needs of the child, and the child's needs are paramount.

Dr. Evan Harris: It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate in support of the amendment tabled and, indeed, championed by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). We have already debated the matter, although I fear that we shall rehearse many of the arguments. I am pleased, however, that the three that I set out in May still hold true.

There are three reasons to ensure that the amendment is passed. First, it is not in the child's best interests when both members of a couple play an equal part in his or her life for only one person to have legal responsibility. The other parent is downgraded to a second-class parent without the power to make vital as well as casual decisions in the child's life that call for a legal guardian. That also poses problems when the adopter is ill or dies, as it leaves no legal relationship between the child and the second and second-class parent. This is especially the case because any residency orders are valid only until the age of 16 or 18 years, depending on the circumstances.

[Dr. Evan Harris]

Secondly, the amendment is important because the current restriction deters many suitable unmarried couples from even applying to adopt, which is bad news for the tens of thousands of children in care who are waiting for suitable adoptive families. Indeed, it is a pleasure, if not a relief, that there is now a human rights opinion that supports that argument. The Joint Committee on Human Rights report says that Earl Howe's amendment

"was advocated at least partly on the ground that one could reliably say, as a general proposition, that children's long-term interests would always be better served by being adopted by a married couple rather than by an unmarried couple, because of the greater stability of married relationships. This argument seems to presuppose that the choice in every case is between those two options. In reality, the choice may be less straightforward . . . For example, one might have to choose between the child being adopted by an unmarried couple, being adopted by a single person, or not being adopted at all. Without a view of the range of options in an individual case, it is hard to say which option would best advance the child's long-term interests. Earl Howe's amendment prevents decision-makers from making that assessment, by cutting out some potentially useful options from the outset. We are therefore not convinced that this will always be the best way of securing the long-term best interests of individual children".

The amendment

"does not seem to make the best interests of the child the paramount consideration, as required by article 21"

of the convention on the rights of the child.

The third reason for returning these amendments to the Bill is the need to end discrimination against unmarried and same-sex couples. Given the stringent application process and the rigorous assessments that are made on a case-by-case basis, there is no justification for disqualifying a couple from adopting jointly simply because they do not possess a marriage certificate, if they clearly possess all the characteristics that the agency would expect of suitable adoptive parents. The Joint Committee says that it is reasonable for people to be able to apply in those circumstances.

We have heard arguments about the Fretté case. The court held that although there was a judgment to be made under the European Court of Human Rights, the French authorities were within their margin of appreciation. There were Conservatives on the Joint Committee, and there is no indication that they demurred from that view. Paragraph 24 of the report says

"Although the judgment in *Fretté* suggests that it might not always be necessary to base a refusal to accept a same-sex couple as adopters on evidence related to an assessment of that particular couple's suitability to adopt, the view of the French authorities in that case (which the Court accepted as within their 'margin of appreciation') was based on doubts about the desirability of same-sex parenting. However, the case provides no support for the view—reflected in Earl Howe's amendment—that it could legitimately be regarded as necessary and proportionate to the aim of protecting the best interests of the child to prevent all unmarried couples, including mixed-sex couples, from being eligible to adopt, regardless of the merits of the individual case."

Paragraph 25 states

"That being so, in our view a blanket ban on unmarried couples being eligible to adopt children would amount to unjustifiable discrimination on the ground of marital status, violating article 14 combined with article 8."

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his references to both the Committee's report and the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, but does he acknowledge that most European states that recognise same-sex relationships also prohibit same-sex adoption, and that the practice in Europe is to oppose it?

Dr. Harris: An interesting aspect of the recent judgment is that this was the first time that such a law had been challenged, or at any rate the first time that the European Court had argued that article 8, on the right to a private life, and article 14, on the right to live without discrimination, taken with another article of the convention, were relevant. Although the judgment was adverse in this case, it is likely that the court will be asked to reconsider, because the judgment was in a sense controversial. I understand that the British judge supported the minority view, of three rather than four, that the action was not proportionate. I think that the subject will be revisited; the Select Committee that we charge with advising us has expressed a clear view.

People have been deterred from applying to adopt by the existing law, and unhappiness has been engendered by those who have adopted under that law. Only yesterday, *The Independent on Sunday* cited an opposite-sex couple, Ken Mason and Helga Petzel, who live in Norwich with their adopted son Michael, who is 11. Michael came to live with them when he was seven and was formally adopted by Mr. Mason in May 2000. Mr. Mason is quoted as saying:

"We never had any desire to parent a small baby and we felt confident that we could offer a home to a child who had not had all the advantages that we had. Marriage had never been an issue for us: we are not religious and felt it would be hypocritical to make vows before a god we didn't believe in and we also felt that we didn't need the state to ratify our relationship. When we were told that we couldn't jointly adopt, we considered getting married but, in the end, I felt sure that we had what it took without needing to.

It was clear from the outset that it would make more sense for me to be the legal parent as my work is flexible and Helga is the main breadwinner. But Helga is a fully involved parent and she should have the same rights as I have.

We have explained the difference in our legal status to Michael and we also said that if marriage was a big issue for him then we would consider it, but he is such a happy and secure child that there has been no need.

I know there are many unmarried couples who would make great parents but they won't come forward until the law changes."

Ms Munn: The hon. Gentleman is making the crucial point that trust is at the heart of the assessment process for prospective adopters. To suggest that people who do not believe in marriage should marry and, therefore, be hypocritical—as in the example the hon. Gentleman cites—would fundamentally undermine the trust relationship at the beginning of the process. That is not in anybody's interest.

Dr. Harris: I see the point that the hon. Lady makes. One cannot claim to be supporting marriage by forcing people into it for other motives, whatever our views on the value of marriage.

The newspaper gave another example, of a same-sex couple—Sarah Halpern, aged 45 and a teacher, Christine Lee, aged 44 and a housing officer, who live in Manchester as a couple with their adopted daughters,

sisters Rachel and Nicola, aged 16 and 14. They were adopted when they were seven and six by Sarah, the single legal parent. Sarah is quoted as saying:

"We had been together for five years when we decided we wanted a family. The decision about who was going to be the parent had to be made right at the start and it was really upsetting. We arranged our working hours so that we could be completely equal parents and it was horrible to have to choose between us.

In the end, it was decided that I would be the adopter because my mother lives much closer."

That is how people are forced to choose. Sarah continued:

"We have had to explain to the girls that Christine had different legal status from me and Nicola was upset to start with because, as she said, 'You're both my mums,' but she understands it now.

This law has to change—we entered into this together, and the girls are clear that we are both their parents. They had a very difficult start in life and the least they can expect is to have two legal parents and to feel as secure as possible."

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Does the hon. Gentleman recall the poll tax, when the Conservative party introduced the concept of joint and several liability for cohabiting and unmarried couples? Does he agree that it is curious, if not hypocritical, to argue that when it comes to paying money to the state, unmarried couples are the same as married couples, but when it comes to making a contribution to society by adopting a child, unmarried couples are second-class citizens compared to married couples? Is not that the ultimate hypocrisy? It shows that the heart of the Conservative party lies with money and not with caring for those in need in society.

Dr. Harris: That certainly applies to the Conservative party, but the present law is peculiar. When it is a question of assessment for benefits, the present law—presumably supported by the Government, in the absence of a civil partnerships register—means that people are considered married if cohabiting, but are not accorded an equal status with marriage when it comes to the many advantages of, for example, public sector pension schemes. Unmarried couples who live together lose out in both ways.

The arguments against the amendment have been put mainly by the Conservatives. The hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), who is unfortunately no longer in his place, tried to reassure us by saying that he had been the chair of a social services committee. Given what he said, that was not much reassurance, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) pointed out. He said that 83 per cent. of couples who were not married went on to break up compared with only 40 per cent. of married couples.

The first point to make, which has been made clear by statisticians and others who have done research in this area, is that we are not comparing like with like. People who do not believe that they will remain with their partner for a lifetime are more likely to be in the group of those who do not get married, because marriage involves a public commitment of some kind. That does not mean that all the people in the unmarried group do not have the same commitment as many of those in the married group. We are, by the hon. Gentleman's own definition, precluding those 17 per cent. of couples from applying to adopt when we allow the 40 per cent. of married couples who go on to break up to apply. That does not seem a rational approach.

5.30 pm

Andrew Selous: What does the hon. Gentleman have to say about the British household panel survey data, which show that the average length of cohabitation is only two years? Surely that is very relevant. It is not only about the numbers of couples who break up, but about how long they are together, which is not long enough to commit to a lifetime of care for a child.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman is talking in averages, and that is the problem. We are talking about particular children with particular needs. I shall come in a moment to the dangers of generalisation.

To return to the point made by the hon. Member for Huntingdon, what if more marriages than unmarried alliances split up as a proportion? I hope that that does not happen. Would he then change his view and disbar married couples from applying to adopt on that basis? It is clearly a reductio ad absurdum, which can happen with arguments put by Conservative Members. That is why it is important not to generalise—otherwise one finds oneself heading towards logical conclusions that I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want to draw.

The dangers of generalisation are clear. Let us suppose—although I am not suggesting for one moment that this is the case—that a sociologist came along with the supposition that parents from a particular ethnic minority group were more likely, marginally or significantly, to separate than those from the majority ethnic group in this country. On that basis, would it be reasonable to say that because, on average, they do not do as well in terms of stability, no one from that group should be allowed to apply? I think that we would abhor such a discriminatory arrangement based on a generalisation and I am sure that many, if not all, Conservative Members would be repelled by such a prospect. However, that is exactly the same logic that is being applied to a group of people—unmarried couples—who are not allowed to apply.

The hon. Member for Huntingdon also made the rather strange point that 95 per cent. of children are currently adopted by married couples and only 5 per cent. by people who are not married—that is, single people. I think that he was saying that there was therefore no need to change the law, a point that was returned to in more depth by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). Surely, however, that is the point. We rely overwhelmingly on a single group of applicants—married couples. If there were a bar on single people applying, the hon. Member for Huntingdon would, according to his logic, have an even stronger argument because he could say that 100 per cent. of children are already adopted by married couples. The situation is peculiar.

It has been argued that expanding the pool of applicants will not lead to more people seeking to adopt. On that basis, the opponents to the Bill's proposal can relax; if such a change in the law will not bring about a significant increase in the number of adoptions by people who are not married, they can rest assured. If it

[Dr. Harris]

does, and those people are judged suitable by the assessment, they should rejoice that more children will be found a place. They are in a no-win situation.

Tim Loughton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be the first to admit that all this hypothesis is not based on any evidence. However, the natural conclusion of his argument is that the 99.83 per cent. of the 11 million married couples in this country who do not end up adopting are less able or likely to be less able to make adoptive parents, particularly for problem children, than those unmarried couples of whatever description who currently do not come forward. On what evidence does the hon. Gentleman think that unmarried couples could better cope with those problem children than the 99.83 per cent. of the 11 million couples who do not currently come forward and should be encouraged to do so?

Dr. Harris: That is not what I said. It is not a competition. I have never suggested that unmarried couples would make better adopters than married couples. I was pointing out that those who passed the assessment process could be equally good.

The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) referred to research that was published today—I shall be more than happy to pass it to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham—which showed that of 430 children, there was not even one inquiry about 129. The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford did not have time to mention that the only inquiries received for 20 children—harder-to-place children—came from single people; and that eight children received inquiries, which, sadly, were futile, only from unmarried or same-sex couples. That suggests that there is, to use a Conservative term, "a market" for harder-to-adopt children among couples who are currently banned even from applying. The evidence that I was sent today is clear on that point.

Mr. Brazier: The proposals will not extend the possibility for adoption to any household anywhere in the country; they will only make it possible for two people in a household to be adopters rather than one. They will not create one more place.

Dr. Harris: I think that they will, because currently people may be deterred from applying as they are not allowed to adopt jointly. The hon. Gentleman might argue that a child needs two parents rather than only one—although I accept that he might not argue that in the case of same-sex couples—so at present heterosexual unmarried couples who shared his view might be deterred from applying to adopt. For example, if the hon. Gentleman were not married, he might find it difficult to apply, although I have no doubt that he would make a most suitable adoptive parent. I hope that I have addressed that point.

The hon. Member for Huntingdon argued, on the basis of an opinion poll, that a majority of people oppose the proposals. The most recent polling data that I can find are from MORI in September 2002. They show that 44 per cent. of people supported the right of same-sex couples to apply—the hardest case as regards popular opinion—while only 36 per cent. opposed that right. I have never held the view that we should go by popular opinion in matters to do with human rights—[*Interruption.*] I am grateful for the sympathy expressed by Labour Members for the necessity of that virtue.

People who pray in aid the fact that there is no public support for the proposals should look more carefully at the evidence from reputable organisations such as MORI rather than from partial organisations—that is the politest description—such as the Christian Institute.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham made some important points and offered a more considered view of the alternative approach than we had heard previously. We should deal with that approach. He argued that the changes would not really expand the pool—a point that was echoed by the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). I do not doubt the strong commitment of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham to adoption or to the Bill. That has been shown by his contributions to the debates. However, that does not mean that he cannot be wrong about something. Even without the evidence that I have just cited from BAAF, produced today, we must ultimately make a judgment as to whether the measure will improve things.

On one side of the argument are the National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and Parents, the Fostering Network, the National Foster Care Association, the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, Barnardo's, the NSPCC, NCH Action for Children, the Association of Directors of Social Services, the Local Government Association, the Children's Society, A Voice for the Child in Care, After Adoption, and so on. Ranged against them only a small number of organisations are persuaded by the views of the hon. Gentleman. That may not be conclusive evidence, but it is certainly persuasive of the fact that the hon. Gentleman is wrong in his estimation of the impact of the proposals.

I want to make two more points about the merits of this matter. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham argued that too many people were put off by the rigors of the assessment process, but, in fact, research done for BAAF in 1999, by Dr. Gilles Ivaldi, who examined applications for approval as adopters that were considered by adoption panels and voluntary adoption agencies, shows that 94 per cent. of those applications were approved as suitable. So there are many reasons why people do not pursue their initial inquiries, but it is not right to say that the assessment process is too harsh. Obviously, a balance has to be struck.

In an intervention, the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) cited the figure, to which Earl Howe referred, from the Christian Institute, which stated that the average length of a closed gay relationship was only 21 months. That figure has to be rebutted. My information suggests that that figure is an inaccurate portrayal of the findings of a survey carried out in 1992. The survey stated that the lengths of same-sex couples' relationships varied between very short and very long—up to 38 years. The mean average length of a relationship was, in fact, almost four times that suggested by Earl Howe. A follow-up study carried out by the same research team in 1998 found that the

average length of gay relationship was almost six years and that, again, many couples were in considerably longer relationships.

The 2001 United Kingdom lesbian and gay census, carried out by ID Research, found that 28 per cent. of gay male couples and 22 per cent. of lesbian couples were in partnerships that had been ongoing for between five and 20 years. ID Research surveyed 10,500 lesbians and gay men nationwide—a far larger sample than the 1992 study cited by the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire. If we were to use averages of faithful, stable relationships, hon. Members would find it difficult to qualify for assessment, and I include the relationships of those in his own party. We must at all times avoid the temptation to generalise, because that way lie despair and destruction.

I should like to deal with the reason that we are discussing this issue yet again. I have made this point before, but it is worth rehearsing: it is unfortunate that we have to debate this issue again. The House of Lords rejected proposals similar to the amendments in lieu of the Lords amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield and supported by the Liberal Democrat party and hon. Member on both sides of the House. Those proposals were rejected not simply because of the Conservative party in the House of Lords. The Conservatives as a parliamentary force are not conclusive in that House and some would say that, although their discussions on this issue are diverting, they are not in the end relevant. To a certain extent, the problem was the hang-ups that the Labour party and, in particular, the Government have about the measure, because no Whip was placed on Labour peers.

Kevin Brennan: Rightly so.

Dr. Harris: I question whether that was right because, if we believe that this is a matter of human rights—particularly those of the child, but also those of potential adopters not to be discriminated against—we should expect parties to state their view so that people can be held to account on the party line. In that respect, the Conservatives have a point about imposing a Whip, but they are inversely wrong by 100 per cent. However, to say that this is somehow a matter of conscience and that the best interests of children should be left to the whim of individuals, without people being able to know what the party line is, appears to let the party off the hook.

If we in the Liberal Democrat party believe that something is in the best interests of children, we say that it is our party's policy, we put it in our manifesto and we impose a Whip. If Liberal Democrat Members decide that they cannot support that line, they vote against the Whip and, although no dreadful punishment goes their way, they are forced to go against the party's view. Had the Government imposed a Whip, however mild, in the House of Lords, 23 Labour peers would not have voted against an amendment similar to that supported by so many Labour Back Benchers in the House and there would not have been a miserable turnout of only 49 per cent. of the mass of Labour peers in support. There are certainly Liberal Democrat peers who are unsure about the measure. By imposing a Whip, however, we were able to secure a 63 per cent. turnout in support, and no votes against. If the Government agree with the Joint Committee on Human Rights and believe in the merits of the case, will they consider staking their reputation and honour on the matter and do the same with regard to the Labour party?

5.45 pm

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman displays yet again his childish attitude to the subject, which he displayed with regard to his amendment the last time that we discussed the matter. Clearly, whether or not a Whip on the Liberal Democrat side involves tickling Members rather than whipping them, there are issues of conscience in relation to this matter on both sides of the House. If he cannot recognise that, he is clearly a member of the Stalinist wing of his party.

Dr. Harris: There are issues of conscience on every matter considered by the House. If the hon. Gentleman is arguing that every time the Government put a Whip on there is no issue of conscience, many of the less slavishly loyal Labour Members will have words to say to him. It is not a question of whether there are issues of conscience and of people having sincerely held views; it is whether the Government are slipping and sliding away from taking responsibility for supporting the measure. The Minister did a fantastic job of defending herself against Jeremy Paxman on "Newsnight"—eight times—on the issue, but people were still left asking why, if the Government want this change, they will not ask their supporters to vote along party lines in this House and in the other place.

Tim Loughton: The hon. Gentleman is being as disingenuous as usual. He has claimed several times that the Liberal Democrats are wonderful because they have allowed a free vote, although it is Liberal Democrat policy to open up adoption. More than a third of Liberal Democrat peers did not support the measure, however, and many of them were present for the vote and actively abstained. The Liberal Democrat leader in the House of Lords, Baroness Williams, has said:

> "Providing there are sufficient married couples to adopt eligible children, I believe they should be preferred over the unmarried."

She, along with more than a third of Liberal Democrat peers, did not vote in line with what the hon. Gentleman claims is his party's policy.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman makes the point that I have just made—there will be people who have differences of opinion. Had the Labour party put a Whip on, and 63 per cent. or nearly two thirds—the figures that he gave are right—turned out in favour of the amendment, we would not be having this debate now, he would not have had to cobble together the defence of his position that we heard earlier, and the measure would be put on the statute book more quickly. The measure needs to get on the statute book—in the form, I hope, amended by this group of amendments—for the best interests of children and in the interests of non-discrimination. I hope that the Government will refute the suggestion in *The Independent* today that senior Whitehall sources argue that if the other place does not back down, the Government will drop the measure. Those kinds of hints, which allegedly come from the Government, send the wrong signals to opponents of the measure in another place. I hope that the Minister will be very clear in her reply that the

[Dr. Harris]

Government are committed to ensuring that the will of this House can override that of the other place, in this Session, before we prorogue.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he is prepared, between now and Prorogation, to see the whole of the Bill lost because the other place may not accept the amendment? We can play ping-pong for several days, but if the Lords do not accept the proposal, the whole Bill may be lost.

Dr. Harris: Interventions such as that make me worry more than rumours in the newspapers about the Government's intent. I hope that the Bill will be passed as amended, and the Government should make it absolutely clear that, if it is rejected in another place, they will send it back again—even that would be something. This debate is about the rights of the child, and opportunities such as this Bill come along only once every 25 years, so the Government ought to be clear about their willingness, at the appropriate time, to use other parliamentary procedures to ensure that the Bill becomes law, in its correct form and as soon as possible.

I return to the main proposition: the Bill needs amendments (a) to (uu). I hope that there is a maximum turnout from each party for the votes, and I pay particular tribute to Conservative Members who are prepared to defy the Whip to make it clear that the rights of the child and the right not to be discriminated against come first.

Ms Munn: It is a shocking fact that a boy over the age of five is unlikely to be adopted even though he is waiting for an adoptive home. Let us think about that for a moment. Let us think about children whom we know, perhaps a son aged seven or eight, a nephew, a next-door neighbour or a child who lives in our street. I repeat: a boy over the age of five is unlikely to find someone to offer him a permanent home.

We have heard it said many times, rightly, that this debate is not about anybody's right to adopt. Nobody has the right to adopt, and that is as it should be. I believe strongly, however, that every adult who is able to offer a loving home to a child should be allowed to do so, regardless of their situation. If they have been assessed as suitable to adopt, they should have the right to apply. If they are deemed to be suitable for a particular child, that child could have a loving home that they might not otherwise find.

As a society that values children, we should ensure that every child has the right to a loving, permanent home. We do not achieve that at the moment. Adoption is fundamentally about children; it is not about the way in which we, as adults, live our lives. It is not about our homes, our party positions or the way in which our party wants us to vote. Those are not the issues today.

I am holding in my hand "Be My Parent" magazine, which has already been referred to. It is a monthly magazine produced by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. I could have looked at it every month when I worked in social services, but I have to tell the House that I did not. I will not get into the bidding war that we had in Committee about who has been in social services the longest—

Mr. Dawson: Because you won.

Ms Munn: Yes, I won. One would think that people who had spent so many years in social services dealing with these issues would have become immune to them. However, I could not look, every month, at the faces of the children in this magazine because every child smiling out from a photo is included not because someone wants to adopt them but because there is already a shortage of adopters in their local authority. Most children in most local authorities are matched with parents who have gone through the process in that area or who have made an arrangement with another local authority. Children appear in this magazine only when they are hard to place.

Hon. Members should look at the thickness of the magazine and think about how many children are included. Let us consider a few of them. The magazine says:

"Ricky is a lively, active boy who loves reading, swimming, watching TV and playing computer games."

Ricky is nine. I make it clear for the record that Ricky is not the child's real name. Joel and Joseph are brothers aged two and four. Thomas, six, appears with his sister, Crystal, aged five. Sapphire, aged nine, is shown with her sister Lauren, seven. Now we move on to the children who are very hard to place, not necessarily because they are difficult but because they are siblings and need to be placed together. Adam, aged 11, is featured with Tamara, nine, and Damien, seven. Finally, a lovely group of boys, aged four to 12, smile out at us—Leonard, Thomas, Jamie and William. For 30 seconds I look at them and think, "Wouldn't it be great to take those four boys home?" If my husband is listening, he will be panicking by now.

The children look nice and are smiling out from their photos, but they have all had a difficult start in life. They have experienced rejection and they have behavioural difficulties. They will test the patience of the most loving, caring and resilient person, not because they are bad children or because they want to behave like that, but because of their experiences.

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Lady speaks with feeling, as always, and I strongly agree with the point that she just made. Surely, however, because of the ghastly experiences that most of those children have had in their birth families, it follows that the hard and fast requirement in many of the advertisements for a great deal of contact with the birth family is bound to put off potential adopters.

Ms Munn: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. One lesson we have learned over the years is that if children have an awareness of their identity and an understanding of who they are, it helps the stability of the adoptive placement. For every child, but particularly for older children, a thorough assessment is needed of what, if any, contact is in the interests of the child. For some children, the right decision is that there should be no contact, ever. That may be the case for children who have been subjected to multiple familial abuse.

For many other children, whose parents have simply been unable to provide the necessary care and support, letterbox contact may be appropriate. It may be important for older children to know that they will see grandma, for example, every six weeks, every six months or once a year. That may help them to settle. It may help a child to know that although he is not seeing his mum and dad or his older brother, they are still all right. We cannot make blanket decisions about contact because it is important not only to consider the needs of the child but—and this is where the hon. Gentleman had a valid point—to consider realistically what prospective adoptive parents can cope with. Those are the two sides of the argument.

Unfortunately, we often end up talking about poor practice and about local authorities that are not doing a good job. When we do that, we do an incredible disservice to children, to hard-working social workers and to the local authorities that are doing a good job. It is always the bad cases that hit the press, but there is a lot of good work, and we need to ensure that all local authorities have good practice and achieve high standards.

Mr. Brazier: I certainly agree with the hon. Lady that we need to emphasise the spectrum of quality and try to raise the standards of all local authorities as high as the best. She acknowledged that it is crucial to take into account the needs of adoptive parents if we want to get them on board. That is precisely why it seems to me so wrong to predetermine the details about optimum contact without taking into account the wishes of prospective adopters. We should let adopters get further down the line before those details are set.

Ms Munn: I shall come on to the detail of the process shortly. Contact details are included in the magazine to give an indication of what is required. Some prospective adopters would say that they could not cope with having contact with the parents, so there would be no point in them even inquiring about certain children. Others would say that they were not sure about contact, so the issue would have to be negotiated.

It is clearly nonsense to suggest that many unmarried parents do not bring up their children in a stable relationship: they clearly do. So why do we want to rule out the possibility of unmarried couples applying to be adopters for some of the children who are waiting for a home? This is not about statistics. It is not about the number of relationships that break down or the number of people who live in gay relationships and how long they have been together. It is about matching children to homes. For that reason, I want to cover the process of applying in detail.

6 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) exploded some of the myths employed in the debate in the House of Lords. Similarly, I want to explode some of the myths mentioned today, especially those raised by the hon. Members for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). Local authorities are trying to get more people to adopt. I wish that it was as easy as the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham suggested. He said that we have a specific number of married couples, and that even if only a proportion of them come forward as adopters there will be homes for all the children. If it were that easy, we probably would not be having this debate, but the fact is that more children are waiting for adoptive homes than there are prospective adopters.

The local authority advertises for more adopters, perhaps for children aged four to seven, and it invites people who phone up to inquire to an open evening. At that stage, some people will decide that it is not for them. Others, however, might think that adoption is for them as a couple, but that they are not ready for it. They might have discovered that they cannot have children of their own and want to go down the route of IVF before returning in two, three or four years' time. Others might think, "Whoops. This is a big life-changing experience. Let's go away and think about it." That explains the drop-out figure. It is a serious and major decision. That might be seen as an obstacle, but I think that it is right that people properly consider whether they should proceed with an adoption.

The next process is training, where people hear more about the children. Most people do not know the background of the children who appear in "Be My Parent" or even those who are up for more straightforward adoption. They learn about the importance of identity and the adoption process. Some people at that point will decide that adoption is not for them. It might not be what they thought it would be or they might decide that they want to have a baby. That is not an obstacle; it is the natural process of people making a decision about a serious matter in their life.

People then have individual assessments with their social worker. We heard much about how social workers put people off, but most of them spend time talking to people about why they want to adopt. They consider their experiences and what they have to offer. At that stage, some people will be counselled out, as we referred to it professionally, perhaps because they have not come to terms with the fact that they cannot have their own child. That could be seen as another obstacle, but I think it is right that people properly consider whether adoption is right for them.

At the end of the process, the social worker tells the adoption panel whether a couple or single person should be approved to adopt. That follows a long discussion on what sort of child is right for them. For some people, it is an issue of gender; perhaps they have boys in their family and want to adopt a girl. For others, it is an issue of age; if they already have children, they will want the right age gap. Those details are considered. We do not have blanket approval of adoptive parents. The idea that we will end up with lots of couples vying for the same child is nonsense. People come into the process with different abilities and skills, which they offer to adopted children.

Providing everything goes smoothly, 94 per cent. of people who are presented to adoption panels are approved, which has already been mentioned. In my five years of chairing an adoption panel and being a decision maker, I think we turned down one person. Local authorities are not in the business of putting up artificial barriers to stop people adopting. There are children who need to be adopted. The social workers know them and

[Ms Munn]

are heartbroken because they cannot find them homes. Local authorities are not in the business of turning people away for spurious reasons.

Tim Loughton: I am listening closely. Of course the decision should be down to people on the ground, but only if they are not constrained by preconceptions. How does the hon. Lady explain the enormous disparity between the number of successful applications in different social services areas, ranging from 2 to 10 per cent? I do not know the figure for Sheffield now or in her time there, but surely those areas where the application rate is much less successful can learn from the more successful areas. That is one thing that we want.

Ms Munn: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I said that there is good practice, better practice and poor practice. I am not defending poor practice. Those areas that are demonstrating poor practice need to be examined and to improve. I have no quibble with that.

What happens next to prospective adopters? Social workers have children who need placements. They tell the adoption team about them and a matching process takes place. If a social worker is lucky, she might have two or three couples or sets of people from which to choose. It is more likely that there will be one choice or the team might say that it has someone in the pipeline. It is nonsense to suggest that a social worker says, "I'm politically correct and I want a gay couple for this child." That does not happen. Social workers are desperate for families and want a couple who meet a child's needs.

In my experience social workers are more conservative—perhaps that is not in their defence—than most hon. Members. For good reasons, most of them want two parents: a mother and a father. They prefer the mum to stay at home because the children—there might be two or three of them—have such demanding needs. They will not specify the mum, but at least one parent needs to have time to spend with the children. Social workers consider each case from the point of view of the child. It would be wrong to place a young girl who has been badly sexually abused and who has a range of needs in a household where there is a man. She could not deal with that. I am not saying that all men are a risk to that child, but it might be right for that child to have two women—two mothers—to provide care and support. It is important to match the needs of the child with a family.

On specifying the ethnicity of a child, I strongly believe that most children grow up best in circumstances that reflect their identity. They do that because those parents will naturally understand that child's background, but it must not be a given. A child should not languish in care because there is no exact match. As chair of the adoption panel, I faced a proposal to match a child from a Muslim background with a family in which one parent was a Hindu. My first reaction was, "My goodness, that is a difficult match," but when we investigated the case, looking into the child's background and the ability of the couple with whom we were placing the child to respect the child's religious background, we realised that it was absolutely the right thing to do—right for the child, because it was the best match we could get. The child was mixed race, as was the family to whom it was going.

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Lady is talking about good practice, but she will remember from the Standing Committee the case of Natalie, who was in care as a baby and therefore in by far the easiest category to place. She was refused to a single mother—a woman who had the means to support her and who, like Natalie, was of middle eastern-European origin—on the ground that the lady was Christian, whereas the baby's origins were Islamic. The good practice that she describes is simply not happening across the spectrum.

Ms Munn: The hon. Gentleman rightly highlights an example of poor practice. I am not here to defend poor practice. The Bill is about continuing to promote good practice. Since their election in 1997, the Labour Government have set out to improve adoption practice and have put in substantial additional resources. That is right, but we should set our standards high and do our best for the children, and the best thing that we can do for those children is to widen the pool. Yes, we should get more married couples to come forward to adopt—we should all talk adoption up.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): My hon. Friend is aware that many children cannot be placed by local authorities and are referred to voluntary bodies. Before becoming a Member of Parliament, I worked for Barnardo's trying to place some of the most damaged children in the area in which I worked. I support my hon. Friend's point that there is a severe shortage of prospective adoptive parents to take damaged children, whether the children are physically disabled—we placed children from hospitals who physically could do hardly anything—or behaviourally disturbed, which presents a major problem—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Lady has made her point.

Ms Munn: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which goes to the heart of our debate. There are many children out there who need homes. If there were more adopters than children waiting for adoption, there might be some merit in the arguments that we have heard, but there are 5,000 children waiting for adoptive homes—not 5,000 families who want to adopt. How can we, in all conscience, deny any of those children a home?

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) referred to eight children in respect of whom only single parents had inquired. Look into the faces of those eight children and tell them that the person making the inquiry cannot be considered for providing them with a permanent home because he or she is not married. I am not prepared to do that, and I hope that Conservative Members are not prepared to do so either.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I rise to support the motion to disagree and a number of the grouped amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), which stand in the name of several hon. Members.

At the outset, I pay tribute both to the hon. Gentleman's work and to his words on previous occasions and today. I am aware, after taking a cursory glance at his biographical details, that he married in 1982. He has considerable experience and was able to knock sideways those who cavilled at his motivation—especially people involved in parts of the media, who might suggest that he had some sort of politically correct agenda. Manifestly, he has nothing of the sort in mind. He is a champion of marriage and he is practising his commitment to it.

I, too, believe in marriage. I am—I hope, God willing—soon to demonstrate my commitment to marriage, when in 33 days' time, here in the House of Commons, I get married. I look forward to the joys of marriage, and I ought to have the humility to put on record my extreme gratitude that I have been lucky enough to find a gracious future wife who has, rather generously, agreed to slow down the process of my inevitable deterioration. That said, and fan of marriage though I am, I do not think that that institution is or should be the centrepiece or defining feature of the debate about adoption. It certainly should not be.

6.15 pm

Several hon. Members have referred to the key statistics that lie at the heart of today's debate. Let the point be underlined: approximately 5,000 children are adopted each year; a similar number again have been decreed suitable to be adopted, but still await willing adoptive families, and those kids are languishing principally in institutional care.

I found extremely powerful the research conducted by British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering. In particular I focused on the research relating to March this year—it has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw)—concerning the group of 430 children who were potentially available for and suited to adoption. It was striking that although overall there were more than 1,200—1,255, I think—inquiries about those children, no fewer than 129 of the 430 were children in respect of whom no inquiries were made. That is a serious situation which no democratically elected politician has the right to dismiss or ignore. That is an extremely challenging state of affairs for legislators.

Alongside those bald statistics, we have to consider the obvious and, I suspect, increasing phenomenon of people coming forward who are not married, but who are cohabiting, and who have, not merely an interest in, but a passion to realise their ambition to have a child. Often, they are people who tried to have children but were unsuccessful, and they want to adopt a child.

It is in that context that the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield have to be considered. As has been said many times, the objective of those who have tabled the amendments is to widen or extend the pool of potential adopters, and I believe that we should judge the arguments on their merits and not seek to impugn the good motives or personal integrity of those who have put their names to the amendments. Let us examine first the argument about extending the pool—a point to which I am sympathetic and which I have discussed with several people over a period of months.

A week or two ago, in the context of making what I thought was an important argument in relation to the Bill, a senior Conservative, who is himself strongly opposed to adoption by unmarried couples, said to me, "This issue is not about gay rights." It so happens that, in the course of the remarks that excited that response, I had made absolutely no reference to gay rights, but there you go. On the point of fact, I agreed with that individual: this issue is not about the rights of gay people, or of heterosexual people, or of married people, or of unmarried people—frankly, it is not about the rights of adults at all. It is about the rights, welfare and futures of some of the most vulnerable children in our society today.

In contemplating this issue and preparing for the debate, I have had a number of conversations with the county adoption adviser in Buckinghamshire, Elaine Dibben. I am happy to say that I learned a lot from those conversations; they were extremely instructive for me. Elaine Dibben told me of a number of harrowing cases and personal tragedies of people in the county of Buckinghamshire who have been judged suitable for adoption but who are the great unwanted, discarded, forgotten children in our society.

I think, for example, of the seven-year-old boy in Buckinghamshire who has been waiting for adoption since July 2000. He is vulnerable and he needs help now. I think of the 10-year-old boy who has been waiting for adoption since January 2000. He is vulnerable and he needs help now. I think, for example, of the brother and sister respectively aged four and six years who come from mixed parentage and who waited for adoption from January 2000 until July 2001, at which point they were taken on by an adoptive family. Sadly, despite best efforts and no doubt good intentions on both sides, that arrangement did not work. Within two months, by September 2001, that brother and sister were back in institutional care, where I am sorry to say they have languished for the succeeding 14 months.

I think, for example, of the sisters aged eight and nine who have been waiting for adoption for the past 12 months. Those sisters are judged and described as hard to place on the ground—surprise, surprise, in common with a great many other siblings—that they want to stay together. They have not yet been placed. Those sisters are vulnerable and they need help now.

I think of the 18-month-old boy who has been waiting for adoption for 12 months, since he was six months old. His situation is the more serious because in addition to the institutionalised care that he has been obliged to endure, he faces threats to himself and the possible retardation of his development for the simple and sad reason that his mother was a drug addict. These are the vulnerable children in our society who are not interested in a theory or an idealisation, but in practical help, demonstrable compassion, effective assistance now.

It is generally true and acknowledged—to try to cut through some of the statistical table tennis in this debate—that there are two valid propositions. First, on the whole, there is frequently a surplus of would-be adoptive parents, but that surplus is of would-be adoptive parents who want to adopt young, healthy, female—for that read generally less difficult—and white children.

[Mr. John Bercow]

The second correct proposition is that there is in many cases a shortage of would-be adoptive parents who are willing, as many hon. Members have said, to take on and give a loving home to children in a different category. Those children might—this is often true—be older; they may very well be boys. In particular, those hard-to-place children are very likely to be those with behavioural problems, who suffer from learning difficulties, or who are afflicted by mental or physical disabilities. We have a duty to address their plight and to see what we can do about their situation.

Mr. Brazier: My hon. Friend is making a passionate and eloquent speech. Those of us who have campaigned for this Bill for many years want the matters that he is raising and the tragic cases—some of which he has listed—addressed, but does he not realise that the proposal would not open one extra home? All that it would stipulate is that, if a child is to be taken into a home and adopted jointly rather than adopted by one adult in the home, that couple would need to get married.

Mr. Bercow: I respect my hon. Friend's sincerity, but I utterly reject the point that he has made, and I am happy to tell him and the House why I do so. If the existing arrangements are manifestly discriminatory, send out a signal of hostility and purposely create categories of adopters—one category of which is made up of first-class citizens and the other of second-class citizens—it is scarcely surprising when some who might otherwise be interested in coming forward and adopting jointly on a basis of equality of esteem choose to give up the unequal struggle against such ludicrous arrangements which continue to obtain. I say in all sincerity to my hon. Friend that I know that he believes in his position with conviction, but the idea that one can simply lecture people and say, "You get married and then you'll be all right, acceptable and we'll approve of you" is simply not acceptable in the century in which I think I now live.

I must emphasise that we are talking about abused, neglected and bereft children who need to be brought up physically, emotionally and spiritually in a family, headed preferably by two parents who are jointly and legally responsible for them. That does not seem to be an unreasonable request. Very often, there is not a great choice. I find it extraordinary that people talk as though the question is simply one of finding the ideal married couple. We should not view this debate in terms of two options that are juxtaposed and rivals to each other. The option of the "ideal" married couple on the one hand and of the "flawed" and, by definition therefore, inferior unmarried and cohabiting couple on the other seems to be a wrong way to look at the matter.

The truth is that in a number of cases, as is demonstrably proven by the evidence of those who continue to languish either in institutional care or in serial and unstable fostering arrangements, the choice is different. The choice in many cases, and the choice in future as cohabitation grows, will be between the offer of a decent, loving, stable and committed home headed by two people who are not married, and the alternative which, despite the best efforts of those who provide the care, is not infrequently the living hell of institutional care or serial fostering arrangements.

Let us consider some of the arguments about whether unmarried couples should adopt. The thesis has been advanced many a time and oft, including in several speeches this afternoon, that cohabiting partners have inherently more unstable relationships. I must say to those who argue that case that we ought to remember our own political and to some extent intellectual mentor in the Conservative party, Disraeli, who, it was said, talked of

"lies, damned lies and statistics".

It may well be valid as a general proposition, as the statistical evidence adduced would appear to suggest, that married couples' relationships are longer lasting and more stable than those of unmarried couples. However, it seems a non sequitur to generalise from those statistics when we are dealing, and when we know that we are dealing, in the context of a debate about adoption, with a specific and self-selecting group of cohabiting people who have a thirst for adoption and are coming forward in the hope that that thirst will be satisfied. That is a different category. In many cases the individuals concerned are older, and they have frequently, as I mentioned earlier, tried to have children and not been successful, which is why they have come forward and taken an interest in the adoption process. Simply to smear them as unsuitable or lesser beings is unwarranted and, in terms of attracting people to adopt, extremely counterproductive.

6.30 pm

Right hon. and hon. Members are duty bound to take account of the nature of the process by which those who initially select themselves as potential adoptive parents come ultimately to be selected or not to be selected, as the case may be, by others. It is important, as other hon. Members have done, to focus on the specifics, the facts and the detail of the process. The way some people speak about it, anyone would think that the adoption process was the parenting equivalent of service in a fast-food restaurant. It simply is not like that.

As evidence in our various constituencies around the country conclusively shows, the process is thorough, rigorous and exacting. It is right and proper that that should be so. When people come forward, they have to go through the entire process. If, for example, they are part of a thoroughly unstable relationship, they are extraordinarily unlikely to get through the process. I want to attend to the detail, because I am concerned about the way in which generalised arguments and—dare I say it?—occasionally deliberate or inadvertent prejudices are tossed around in the course of these debates.

What can we say about the process? There might be an initial inquiry by telephone or letter. Information would then be sent out, with details of an information session. The person or couple would have to attend the information session, there would be an interview with a social worker, and a series of statutory checks would be made. There would be attendance at a preparation group, and following that, interviews with two social workers. An assessment would be started with a social worker, on the principle of home visits, of which

typically there would be six or eight, conducted over a period of three months or so. Follow-up workshops would be held.

There would be referees to be visited by the social worker, there would be the crucial form F report to be completed, and there would be a second opinion visit by a second social worker. The applicants would have the opportunity to read and comment on form F. The social worker would present the report to the adoption panel, the adoption panel would make a recommendation to the adoption agency, and the adoption agency would make a decision. If, after that recitation, right hon. and hon. Members and others attending to our proceedings elsewhere are not already exhausted, I have to tell them that that is not the end of the process.

An agency decision might be made that a child would be put into a willing adoptive family, but as we all recognise, that is a trial arrangement. In due course, an assessment of the success or otherwise of that trial would be made. The assessment would be made by a judge in a family or county court. That is an extremely important safeguard. Throughout the rigorous, thorough and exacting process that I have described, certain criteria are to the fore—the stability of the couple's relationship, the extent of the networks of support available, the details of the family histories involved, and the capacity or, as it may transpire, the incapacity of the would-be adoptive parents to create space, in the widest sense of that term, for the entry of a new child into the family. It is an extremely rigorous, highly valuable and very serious process. To cavil at it or to appear to dismiss its significance or quality is cruelly unfair to those who labour long and hard in pursuit of the interests of children.

That leads me to what happens now. I pay tribute to the many right hon. and hon. Members who know a lot more about the subject than I do. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), with whom I have had some productive conversations on the subject, and a number of whose contributions to debate I have read. My hon. Friend, in the best Conservative tradition, is focused on the practicalities—the here and now, the reality of what happens in the society in which we live.

As we know, couples who are cohabiting already adopt. That is true not only of heterosexual couples, but of gay couples. However, they do not adopt jointly, so they face the peculiarly unenviable dilemma of deciding which of them is to have the status of the adoptive parent, and which of them is to accept the lesser role of second-class citizen whose fate and limitation it is, perhaps, to acquire a residence order which will lapse when the child involved reaches the age of 16 or 18.

I hope that it will command general assent to say that, quite apart from the fact that such a discriminatory arrangement within the family creates injustice, inequality, instability and possibly unhappiness in the mind of the child, who will naturally view both partners as his or her parents, there are also damaging practical consequences that flow from that peculiarly anomalous legal arrangement. For example, if the adoptive parent dies, the adoptive parent's partner—that is to say, from the vantage point of the child, his or her other parent—will not have an automatic right to become the adoptive parent. He or she will have to go through the whole process, with all the attendant uncertainty and stress, and the possibility of a sad culmination of events. If, for example, the adoptive parent's partner dies, there can be many instances in which the child does not have a right to inherit the estate of his or her other parent. If the couple split up, the partner who is not the adoptive parent currently has no responsibility in law to contribute to the cost of maintaining the child.

Those are significant downsides and injustices, about which we should not be complacent. If, on the other hand, we go for reform, tidy up the law and practise the principle of equity, the situation could be a great deal better. Under child support legislation and under the relevant schedule of the Children Act 1975, the interests of the child will be safeguarded and promoted, in terms of the opportunity to make maintenance orders, and in terms of the transfer and settlement of property. Those are important considerations.

I shall focus now on the consensus in support of reform, which is a powerful consideration. The hon. Members for Chatham and Aylesford and for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) have, in the course of the debates, made much of the organisations that support reform, and they have been right to do so. I simply pose the question, and I admit that I pose it in particular to some of my right hon. and hon. Friends, whether it is entirely wise to ignore or disregard the fact that 29 of the 30 organisations that gave evidence and made representations to the Special Standing Committee on the Bill argued in favour of these particular amendments or, at any rate, the principle that underlies them. I think that that is an extremely relevant consideration. I do not say that it is conclusive of itself, but it is a material consideration. Simply to dismiss as the politically correct social worker brigade the organisations whose daily responsibility and privilege it is to cater for the interests of children betrays a degree of arrogance and ignorance that is unworthy of a serious debate on these important subjects. The people in those organisations know what they are talking about.

Andrew Selous: I am listening with great interest to my hon. Friend, who is clearly speaking with great passion and conviction in dealing with a matter about which he feels very strongly. On the number of organisations that support a particular argument, he will recall when 264 economists, I think, wrote to *The Times* to say that the policies of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, were incorrect. Lord Howe ignored that advice and was later proved to have been right in doing so.

Mr. Bercow: I must admit that I do not think that a powerful argument. However, I shall do my best to improve it. With characteristic self-effacement, my hon. Friend understated what I confess I believe to be a poor case. He referred to 264 economists, but in fact, of course, 364 economists excoriated my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven and her colleagues for pursuing those economic policies. I say to him that economics is a notoriously inexact science. If one meets any three economists, one will unfailingly hear at least five opinions, so it does not seem to me that we should be too influenced by that consideration.

What we are talking about are people in professional practice dealing not with theories and isolated models such as those in the discipline of economics, but with the

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practice of social work, care for children, human understanding, interpersonal relations and societal development. Those are very important differences.

Jonathan Shaw: May I assist the hon. Gentleman in strengthening his argument in respect of the 29 agencies that gave evidence to the Special Standing Committee? Members of the Committee had the opportunity to cross-examine those agencies and put questions to them. Their submissions were not merely letters in a newspaper; we had the opportunity to put questions and test their arguments.

Mr. Bercow: I agree. I should add that it seems a poor line of argument merely to say that, as the amendments were not proposed at the outset and arose only at a later stage, they cannot be of much significance. What is the point of having a number of different stages in the passage of a Bill, including pre-legislative scrutiny, as now favoured by the Government, and the opportunity for specialist representations to be made, if one simply dismisses them out of hand when they happen to conflict with one's preconceptions? I was influenced by what happened and I took the trouble to read the evidence.

I should like to conclude with reference to the parliamentary management of this issue. There has been a good deal of discussion in the past few days, as people may have noticed, about the way in which the subject has been handled, especially on the Opposition Benches. The judgment was made to impose a three-line Whip—that is to say, to instruct Conservative Members of Parliament to vote against the amendments. I must emphasise that this is the second occasion on which that has been done. It was done last May and it has been done again.

I do not mind saying to the House that in May this year, after much soul searching, and with a heavy heart and, frankly, a guilty conscience, I did what is not customary for me and stayed away. I did not take part. If I remember rightly, I sat instead in my office. I had on this occasion to ask myself how I should react to the situation that has been presented to me and which other hon. Members will have to address. Of course, there is never any shortage of well intentioned and often friendly people who will say, "Don't go to the wall over it; it's not worth having a big fight. After all, it is only one issue, and"—wait for it—"it's the Government's problem to get their Bill; and if they lose it, that's their tough luck." That would be the easy way out. I think that it would be a cop-out, a get-out and a sell-out for somebody who feels as strongly as I do on this matter to take that course of action. I concluded that I was not prepared to convict myself of that abdication of responsibility.

6.45 pm

I think that the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield and supported by others are sound. They offer hope and could make the situation better. I believe that what we need in this debate is less prejudice and more fairness. We should aspire to govern Britain as she is, not Britain as she was. We should govern on the basis of enduring principles adapted for proper application to the circumstances of the time. What we need are open minds, generosity of spirit and a readiness to understand the point of view of others. For goodness' sake, let us try to think outside the box—the way in which we, our party members or others who think or live like us, would naturally react. I am concerned about those damaged, bereft, neglected and vulnerable children, and I am not prepared to pass up any practical opportunity that might enable us to make their lives better.

It has been a privilege to serve in the shadow Cabinet over the past 14 months under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith). I am grateful to him for the opportunities that he has given to me. I hope that I have made some very modest contribution, and I look forward to supporting him and my party in the Lobbies and on these Benches in the weeks, months and years ahead.

I conclude simply by thanking my hon. and right hon. Friends for the courtesy and understanding that they have shown me on the occasion of the decision that I have felt compelled to make.

Liz Blackman: I commend the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) for his fine speech. At any event, my speech was going to be very short and to the point, but I have since revised it to being extremely brief. By this stage of the debate, the main points will have been aired, but I want to emphasise a couple of points that are worth either the repeating or the sharing.

Although it sounds extremely crude to say so, I believe that the issue is about supply and demand. It is about demand for good-quality parents to come forward. Currently, the supply of such parents does not match the demand of children: notably those who are languishing in local children's homes, as the hon. Member for Buckingham said. That must be at the forefront of our minds. It has been suggested that 5,000 children are in care. That number could even be slightly higher, but every one of those children is a child without a safe, secure and loving context. The longer those children stay in children's homes, the longer they will have to learn as a norm the worst ways of children who are older than them, who got into the system before them, and who are even more abused and rejected than the younger ones who are coming through.

That is the issue; it is about encouraging good-quality parents to come forward and offer those children hope. That is what the children try to cling to. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) spoke movingly about children who never saw anybody come forward and make an offer to adopt them or even express interest in them so as to raise a little hope or start the process.

There are two main reasons why supply and demand do not match one another. One of them is the profile of the children, about which I and many other hon. Members have talked. They are not cuddly babies any more, but challenging children, many of whom have special needs. The other factor that has not helped is the legislation under which we are currently working, which is 25 years old. Any legislation that is 25 years old has difficulties keeping up with the pace of change. Adoption legislation is no exception. The Bill is an

excellent piece of legislation, but the issue about unmarried parents and same-sex couples is not a bolt-on concept. It is not something that can be ignored while the rest of the Bill sails through, everything being all right and supply meeting demand.

It is crucial to attract more good-quality parents and to widen the pool. Failing that, we are talking a good talk but we are not solving the problem. If we do not adopt that approach, we shall find in two years' time after this wonderful debate that there are the same statistics. That is not what we should be about.

If we do not accept the amendments, we shall be saying to the child, "You are not entitled or allowed to have a legal relationship with both the adults in your life who provide you with a loving, caring home. You are allowed only one." I think back quite a long way. If I had been in that situation as a teenager—perhaps a damaged teenager or a stroppy teenager—I would have exploited it to the maximum. At the same time, I would have felt insecure. The message that is given to adults who are coming forward to offer their parenting skills—this applies especially to the one who is not adopting the child—is that they are not quite up to the mark. They feel that they are being told, "You are not quite up to the mark. We do not value you in the same way as we value your partner."

Adults go through a rigorous selection process. We marvel and are delighted when such parents produce wonderful, secure and loving homes for children through adoption. However, the basic message is, "Carry on as you were doing and as you are doing, but we ain't going to recognise you." That is not only a matter of equality. Indeed, it is a practical matter. It is one that sends a wrong signal and will not result in more parents coming forward. It is the reason why few parents have come forward who are in an unmarried relationship or who are part of a single-sex couple.

Opposition Members, especially those who are against the amendments, have said that about 90 to 95 per cent. of couples who are adopting are married. That is not surprising. One of the main messages being given out by current legislation—I hope that future legislation will not do so—is, "You are not quite valued in the same way as your married neighbours." The situation is wrong from a practical point of view as well as in terms of equity.

I was extremely concerned by the veiled threat of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench—in fact, there was not much veiled about it—when he suggested that there is a severe danger that the proposed legislation, as a package, will not pass through Parliament if things go wrong for him tonight. I hope that I have misinterpreted his remarks. The hon. Gentleman seemed to be saying, "If we do not get a resolution that goes our way, the Bill will be in danger of collapsing." Obviously we are faced with prorogation. I hope that what the hon. Gentleman suggests is not the case.

The Bill is a fine piece of proposed legislation. With others on both sides of the Chamber, I have been heavily involved with it. However, it will be a fine piece of legislation only if it is implemented in full and if we can get additional prospective caring and loving parents into the system that offers many damaged children a real opportunity and a real chance.

Mr. Brazier: It is a privilege to have the opportunity again to speak on adoption. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman), who has been closely concerned with the Bill throughout its consideration.

I shall start with two general points. First, I support all those on both sides of the Chamber who have said that it is an excellent Bill. I have been campaigning for six years for the adoption of children who are in care. I have looked with horror at the extraordinary spectrum. When the campaign started, fewer than 1 per cent. of children in care in many local authorities were adopted. Some of the best authorities were achieving an adoption rate of more than 12 per cent. Behind these bleak statistics there are many horrifying cases.

The measures in the Bill have been ably listed by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton). They range from the introduction of the national register to the provisions to speed up the current desperately slow court procedure. So many lawyers are calling for a faster process. There are also the guidelines for social workers and adoption panels. There is so much positive material in the Bill that will improve the chances of children in care being adopted.

Secondly, I shall draw the interest of the House to a case that may be of use in developing regulations. An especially horrifying case was put before the all-party group on adoption, the details of which I have sent to the Secretary of State, which concerned an adoption that had broken down. By chance, it involved one of the right hon. Gentleman's constituents, and I received a most courteous reply about it. The father who adopted the child was a social worker and was familiar with working with children. The case illustrates the extreme importance of psychiatric assessments in cases where allegations are made against parents. In the instance to which I am referring, the allegations were made by a deeply damaged girl after 10 years of successful adoption. She made terrible allegations that were proved to be entirely false. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for agreeing to examine the case. In considering the Bill on a broad spectrum, we never discussed proper psychological assessments after, tragically, adoption has started to break down.

Members on both sides of the House—not least my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), in his powerful speech—have acknowledged that we are talking not about the rights of adults. Instead, the issue is about the interests of the child. I was privileged to serve on the Special Standing Committee under the extremely able chairmanship of the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who managed to combine impartiality for most of the time while making his own powerful points when he wanted to do so. I believe that there was only one organisation that argued against the provision that the rights of the child should be paramount. That was the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, which wanted to enter a caveat. Basically, however, almost all organisations accepted that children's rights should be paramount. I think that every Member who has contributed to the debate agrees that that is common ground.

We are dealing in many instances with desperately damaged children. There is one case from my constituency surgery that involves two little boys, which

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illustrates the baggage that children bring with them. The two children were unconnected except that they had the same adoptive parents. From memory, they were aged six and seven when they were adopted. One child had been pushed out into the cold so often that he suffered severe frostbite in his feet. He had to be treated for gangrene and came close to amputation. The other child had been kept locked in a cellar for so long that he had no speech skills.

It is against that background that we must ask how we can best help such children. No one in the Chamber has any doubt that those of us who accept the argument that I am advancing on the Opposition Benches feel every bit as strongly about doing well for these children as those who oppose the argument.

7 pm

In principle, the proposed change provides no extra placement anywhere in the country.

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brazier: If I may finish the point, I shall be delighted to give way to the hon. Gentleman. I did that many times in Committee, and he often returned the favour.

Under current law, anybody, in principle, can apply to adopt, but if two people want legal ties to the child, they must have legal ties to each other. [*Interruption.*] I think we have a view from the Gallery.

Mr. Dawson: Why not?

Mr. Brazier: Absolutely. As a Catholic, I am used to hearing exasperated priests preaching through babies' noises. That is what it is all about.

Current law does not exclude anyone. It provides simply that two people who want to adopt jointly and to have legal ties to the child should have legal ties to each other. Several speakers, including my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham, pointed out some administrative problems. The principal one is the death of the adopting party. When a child comes into a relationship, it has no idea about the paperwork. It is important that the child feels secure and has progressed in a new home. I cannot believe that, in cases of death, the courts would frequently refuse the surviving partner the right to adopt. We are considering damaged children who require our closest attention, and the problems that afflict them are much broader and more likely to arise than the death of the adopting individual.

Nobody would argue that every marriage is perfect. From time to time, my good lady reminds me that my marriage is imperfect. I pay tribute to my wife, who has done 18 years' service—six more than it took me to get my Territorial decoration—for putting up with me. Nobody argues that there are no stable relationships outside marriage. However, the burden of the statistics is overwhelmingly on the side of marriage. A survey that the Office for National Statistics conducted in 1997 says it all for me.

The survey showed that a child born 10 years earlier, in 1987, whose parents were married had an 81 per cent. chance of being with parents who remained married in 1997. A child born into an allegedly stable relationship in 1987, whose parents did not get married almost immediately afterwards, had only a 15 per cent. chance of being with parents who remained in a stable relationship 10 years later.

Jonathan Shaw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brazier: In a moment. We hear time and again about social workers' assessments. However, appalling assessments from so many social workers, albeit not from across the board, but in many local authorities, led me to start a campaign on the subject. The idea that the views of a specific social worker on a relationship are so powerful that such statistics can be brushed aside in the best interests of the child is unconvincing.

Mr. Bercow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brazier: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me, but I promised to give way to the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) first.

Mr. Dawson: It is kind of the hon. Gentleman. We have moved a long way from the point about which I wanted to intervene. As someone who is steeped in the subject and has a tremendous record of concern and commitment on the issue, does he agree that if we deny the opportunity to unmarried couples to adopt jointly, we may turn away people who have something to offer to deeply damaged children? At the very least, we could undermine the basis on which a good, secure relationship could be founded with those children. Surely the hon. Gentleman does not want to do that.

Mr. Brazier: I have never argued for discrimination. We have civil law marriages in this country and, as the hon. Member for Wakefield said, the vast majority of cases involve heterosexual couples. We simply ask, if both individuals want to have legal ties to the child, is it so much to expect them to make a binding legal tie to each other? A civil marriage contract is simply that.

Mr. Bercow: If my hon. Friend had a free hand and was starting from scratch, would he prefer to prohibit individual gays adopting? If not, and acknowledging that there are many successful gay adoptions, although they form a minute proportion of the total, why is he opposed to gay couples adopting jointly to the extent of supporting a three-line Whip, which many of us believe sad and ill judged?

Mr. Brazier: Let me deal with my hon. Friend's principal point. A moment ago, I gave the statistics for heterosexual couples. I also said that, when they split, there was a problem similar to that in divorce cases, but that there was a much greater likelihood of a split between unmarried couples and that the affected children had already been badly damaged. The argument that I applied to heterosexual couples applies in spades to homosexual couples. Their partnerships last a much shorter time than those of heterosexual couples. Before my hon. Friend says that he can point to individual cases of long-lasting relationships, I accept that there are a few. However, we are dealing with a relatively small pool about which not many statistics are available.

In heterosexual relationships, couples tend to marry or break up in a year or two after the child arrives. When the pool is large enough to consider, I suspect that that will apply to homosexuals. I understand my hon. Friend's point but I do not agree with it. My point is about splitting up rather than homosexual adoption.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman carefully and I agree with much of his speech, although not with his last comments. Does he accept that he is falling into the trap to which the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) referred? He is generalising in his use of figures.

The hon. Gentleman said that social work assessments had gone wrong in the past and mentioned the problems that he experienced. There are two other checks that we should consider. The first is the role of the guardian ad litem after the assessment process and the second is that of the court. The hon. Gentleman appears to fail to accept that a range of opportunities are available for examining in detail the merits or otherwise of individual applicants.

Mr. Brazier: I am not sure whether I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The guardian ad litem service is a big issue. I know that he and other members of the Committee share the anxiety about the muddle in it. It is a scandal that could do much to undermine the good work in the Bill. I am glad that the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), is present; she is taking a close interest in the matter. However, to answer the hon. Gentleman's point directly, I do not have much faith in the courts on family matters. Indeed, they can be only as good as the information that they receive. The guardian ad litem service was good, but has sadly suffered heavily in the past two or three years. It provides an extra safeguard but that does not greatly affect the argument.

Jonathan Shaw: The hon. Gentleman likes to use examples, often from his own postbag or constituency surgery, to illustrate and advance his argument. Perhaps I can offer him another example. Let us take a situation in which two gay men were fostering a child who had all kinds of different challenges, and it was felt that the best people to look after that child for the rest of its life were those two individuals. Would the hon. Gentleman deny that child the opportunity to be adopted by those two people?

Mr. Brazier: I am afraid that on the basis of the arguments that I have put forward, my answer would be yes. I do not, however, see any reason why one of those people should not adopt the child. I should have made it clear when I answered the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham earlier that my first choice for adoption would always be a married couple. I accept the principle of the occasional gay adoption, but only when there is no one else available. Hard cases make bad law—[*Interruption.*] I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Kevin Brennan: I did not intend to make an intervention, but as the hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity, I shall do so. He may be right to say that hard cases make bad law, but he is always using them as examples when trying to make his points.

Mr. Brazier: Every single child in care is a hard case, in the sense that the hon. Gentleman uses the phrase. Those who have been in care for more than a year are harder cases, and those who have been in care for more than four years—of whom there were 12,000 when we started campaigning—are very hard cases. I was referring earlier to getting further and further into legal technicalities.

Dr. Evan Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brazier: I will, but then I really must conclude my remarks.

Dr. Harris: I want to take the hon. Gentleman back to the important points about generalisation, and the problems surrounding it, that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and I raised. If the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) could identify a group of married people that had exactly the same rate of separation that he attributes to unmarried couples—for example, a particular ethnic minority or, perhaps, married service men and women, although I am not suggesting that this is the case— would he execute a broad ban on that group seeking to adopt? If not—since he has said that separation is the key factor—why not?

Mr. Brazier: I do not know of any such category. Service families are not such an example. It is true, sadly, that the divorce rate in the Army and the Navy is higher than the national average, but it does not begin to compare with the staggering amount of separations among unmarried couples. It reflects the overstretch that the armed services suffer from at the moment. So I know of no such category, but if I did I would not support a ban on any particular ethnic group. Civil marriage does not ask that people have a particular religion, or anything else other than that they make a public commitment of permanence. That is all it asks. In the debates that took place in the 19th century about the introduction of civil marriage, I would have been on the side of those who wanted to introduce it, precisely because it provided an opportunity for people of no particular religious faith to make a public, legally binding commitment. That is all it involves, and it seems to me to be a perfectly reasonable criterion for adoption by two people who both want legal ties to the child.

Mr. Bercow: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way; he is always generous in that respect. I want to clarify exactly what his position is. Is he arguing his absolutist stance in support of only married couples being allowed to adopt to the extent that, even if the only reason why an otherwise thoroughly suitable couple could not adopt was that there were religious impediments to their marriage, he would still rule them out?

7.15 pm

Mr. Brazier: The short answer to that is no, because religious impediments would not stop them having a civil arrangement. Forgive me, but that really is not an argument at all.

[Mr. Brazier]

I want to finish by making a wider point. In his excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham touched on the fact that there were several other ways in which we could broaden the pool. I want to mention two of them. These measures would introduce extra homes and provide extra opportunities for children in care to be adopted, not through a technicality involving a one-person adoption in a two-person home. They would provide real extra homes.

The first measure would involve a relatively small redrafting of the first clause of the Bill. We had an indication on the Floor of the House from the Minister's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), that he appeared to be in favour of such a redrafting, which would alter clause 1(5) so that the requirements on ethnicity and religion would be subservient to the provision in clause 1(3) that there should be no undue delay. Some of the examples that my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham read out illustrated that many local authorities still take the view that they would rather not have a child adopted at all than let the child go to a family that does not match the ethnicity or religion of that child. That is the real scandal.

The second example involves contact. I think that the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) mentioned this earlier, and I accept his point that a balance has to be struck. We have to consider the circumstances of the child in the birth family from which he or she was extracted. We must, of course, take account of the fact that the child may have made a real bond with an auntie or a granny, or someone else who played no part at all in the unhappy circumstances that led to the child being taken into care. We must also, however, make a reasonable assessment of what it is fair to ask an adoptive parent to take on. In my view, this can only be done after an adoptive couple has been lined up. It cannot, as those wretched advertisements suggest, be prejudged, if we want adoptive parents to take on damaged children.

I have not had the courage to adopt a child, but the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) has done so and she knows how much I admire her for sharing her experiences with us. If I had had the courage to take on those two little boys who I mentioned earlier, with all that history, and someone had said to me—as the courts more and more frequently do these days; we even have advertisements from the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering that apparently prejudge these decisions—"Ah, but we want there to be letter-box contact with the birth parents", I cannot believe that even the bravest adoptive parents in the land would stand for it. If someone is taking on really damaged children, they cannot be expected to accept mail from the parents who inflicted the damage; that sort of decision must be made later in the process. That is my second suggestion for widening the pool. Social workers in my own area, including the former director of social services, have told me of individual adoptions that would otherwise have gone through but did not do so because of court rulings on contact with the birth family.

I shall end where I came in: this is not the burning issue of the hour. The measure was not even in the original Bill. This is a good Bill, and I believe that the best way to look after these children is by extending the opportunities in the way that has just been described, rather than by going down the route of introducing fresh legal complexities—because that is all that this is—to adoption.

Ms Dari Taylor: This is the third time that I have spoken in a debate on the Adoption and Children Bill. Each time, it has been a pleasure, because everyone speaks with such warmth and commitment. Although I disagree with much of what the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) said, I totally applaud his integrity. It was a positive treat to listen to the powerful speech by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). It was seriously timely, and I see him as a Member who is making a commitment to a good Bill by reinstating amendments and by putting his career second. Well done!

This is an excellent Bill. It offers services, opportunities and controls, and, crucially, it says that the rights of children should be put first and foremost. It will speed up the process and introduce a gamut of services to provide support if breakdown in adoption is threatened. Most particularly and specifically, it will widen the pool of potential adopters. That is the essence of the debate for us all: how do we widen the pool of adoptive parents?

Many believe that because the Bill is good and because it will speed up the processes, those things will of themselves increase the number of potential adopters. I am sad to say that, although that will have an effect, it will not answer the charge. We want to widen the pool and increase the number of people who want to take on an adoptive child, but we must encourage them to accept that many such children have histories—seriously damaged histories—that they will have to cope with. That is an enormous task, so, as the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said, widening the pool is not straightforward. I suggest to him, however, that his argument to the House is based much more on confused prejudice than on careful thought.

The amendment that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) introduced, which I hope is reinstated by the House tonight and respected by the other place, aims most particularly at widening the pool, giving people the opportunity to have an equal, open and fair relationship with the children whom their partners may have adopted. Most crucially, in aiming to widen the pool, the amendment acknowledges a statement that has been made time and again in the debate, but I shall make it again: we are giving children an opportunity to live in a loving, stable family.

Sharing my experience with the House, let me say again that I worked in a care establishment. I shall not criticise it, but in no way, shape or form is it better to put a child of four, six or nine with other children in a dormitory where there is no mum, no special relationship and no shoulder to cry on so that the child who is crying can feel that he or she will be treated with sympathy. The answer that is given so many times is, "Don't be so silly—get to sleep." That is because one care worker has to look after 15 children who all need

help and attention. How on earth can we conclude that the loving relationship that produces a well-balanced child is present in such circumstances? It is not.

Some children go from home to home. There is nothing wrong with the homes, but after 40 different ones, such children find it impossible to establish a relationship that is seriously stable and has controls to it. The children are shunted from one to another and believe that nobody wants or loves them.

Children in the care establishment where I worked looked at me and said, "Miss, do you think that, one day, someone will want me to live with them?" Does the House think that I ever had the confidence to say to a child, "There is nobody there for you and nobody wants you. You're 14, and you have serious problems. It will take a serious family to take you on board, and you need a lot of support so that you can live in that family." I could not tell a child those things—I did not have the courage.

The plain fact is that, every year, 2,000 children live the reality of that statement—there is no one there for them. Members are putting to the House their clear, committed ideas on married couples and saying that they are the best and the ideal. Nobody denies or doubts that, but often, we are not dealing with the best or the ideal. We live with reality. A constituent phoned me, as she knew that the debate was taking place today. She said, "I ask you to say one thing in that House of Commons: legislators, get real." I ask the House to do that.

I want to widen the debate, as we often believe that some groups in our communities will never accept that unmarried couples have the right to adopt or that unmarried gay couples, or gay couples that cannot marry, have no right to adopt. I refer to a letter from the Nottingham branch of the Catholic Children's Society, which, for 50 years, has been recruiting and placing children for adoption:

"Through innovative and pioneering practice in the Voluntary Adoption Sector over two decades, many excellent placements have been achieved for older children with troubled histories with single carers, who would not previously have been considered suitable for adoptive parenting because of their lone status during a time when marriage was perceived by society as the 'norm'."

The society takes matters a stage further by saying that it has

"5,000 children who currently wait for such family placements . . . recognition should be given to the potential family resources provided by couples who are not married, but can show, through an increasingly rigorous Adoption Preparation and Assessment Programme, that they have the necessary stability and commitment, both to each other and to any child or children they may parent."

I put that statement to the House. It takes a lot for a Catholic organisation—I am an Anglo-Catholic—to move in such a direction and to see the need to identify such appropriateness. I can only ask hon. Members to hear what the society is saying.

In the House of Lords debate, it was implied in much that was said that natural parents are best. I ask the Members of the other place who made such comments to accept that they are undermining the serious manner and the whole process of adoption. Natural parents listened to what one of them said: the view was that only birth parents could provide young children with successful relationships, love and security, and that anything less was second best, with gay parenting at the bottom.

I found it quite disturbing that thoughtful people in the other place held such a view; I felt quite reduced by it. I am an adoptive parent of some 21 years, and I do not think that my love for my child has been less than that which any other person might have offered. The House knows me well—I think that my love has been less questioning and more evident than that of many others. I found that view seriously unacceptable.

For me, the Bill is about widening the group that could or would consider becoming adoptive parents. The scrutiny of potential adopters does not involve the marriage contract, but, importantly, it is rigorous. It attempts competently to define whether they could produce a stable home and a loving relationship. That is what we are here to achieve in widening the pool. I hope that the House accepts that reintroducing the amendment will help to achieve the loving home longed for by thousands of children.

Mr. Lansley: It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), who spoke from the heart. Participating in the debate is a humbling experience, because many contributions have been excellent in so many different ways. At this stage, therefore, I want not to rehearse previous arguments, but to consider the question that the House must answer at the debate's conclusion.

One of the excellent speeches was made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who presented a difficult case in an exemplary fashion. However, I want to question one or two aspects of it.

7.30 pm

This does not strike me as a side issue. It was not part of the original Bill, but if Conservative Members try to justify—or exclude from justification—any aspect of a Bill not originally introduced by the Government, we deny ourselves a range of valuable arguments. Moreover, we must consider the nature of the Bill with which we are dealing, and compare it with the legislation of 26 years ago. This Bill proposes that a child's interests throughout its life should be the paramount consideration, not that its interests throughout childhood should be the first consideration.

That important change means that we must think hard about all the circumstances of adoption at this point. It would be remiss of us to transfer any aspect of the decision that must be made to a point in the future, or to a separate discussion in a civil partnerships review. If we are genuinely considering the best interests of children in relation to the adoption system, we should think through all the aspects. That was contemplated on Second Reading, not least by Ministers. I remember the Secretary of State for Health, who is present, saying that he looked forward to the debate in the Special Standing Committee, the implication being that if there was a justification for a further change he would have no objection. That turned out to be the case.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who fostered my original interest in, and understanding of, the immense difficulties

[Mr. Lansley]

experienced by children who are looked after by local authorities, when we served together on the Select Committee on Health. I would feel resentful if it were thought that I, along with some of my hon. Friends and, indeed, Labour Members, was promoting this issue purely in order to campaign on "lifestyle" issues. The hon. Member for Wakefield and I probably have similar views on many of the matters that we are discussing, but we hold those views less on the basis of any assertion about the lifestyles of adults than on that of the interests of children. Happily, that has been the context of the debate: we are all keen to establish what is in children's best interests.

I think that all the legal arguments can be dealt with in the same context. If it is true that children's best interests should be paramount—which was established by the United Nations convention on the rights of the child—it follows logically that if by extending the ability to adopt to, for instance, unmarried couples we can improve children's prospects by one jot, we are obliged to do that.

I do not know—other Conservative Members have asked the question—whether at the end of the process it will be possible for all children placed for adoption to be adopted by married couples because of improvements elsewhere in the Bill; but even if that is so, we cannot know at this point. We must allow for the possibility that we do not meet all our objectives in terms of securing suitable adoptive parents, even with all the other measures in the Bill. It would be remiss of us not to take the opportunity presented to us now.

It has always seemed straightforward to me. We must contemplate offering the possibility of adoption to unmarried couples, because some will have been deterred in the past by the structure of the legislation, by the presumptions implicit in that legislation and, not least, by the difficulty of determining who is the adoptive parent and who is not. It must be in the interests of children to establish a lasting legal relationship. In the past, when residency orders have been involved, they have expired when children have reached a certain age. If we are now to be concerned about children's interests throughout their lives, by definition we must look beyond residency orders and try to create that lasting legal relationship.

All Members must think about how they will vote, but that applies particularly to Conservative Members, because we are being asked to support the House of Lords and to oppose the hon. Member for Wakefield. That would cause me immense difficulty. The hon. Gentleman and I discussed an amendment along these lines at the beginning of the year, or perhaps last year. I made it clear on 29 October last year, on Second Reading, that the Bill should address this issue. I wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 1 March this year, saying that I would support the extension of adoption to unmarried couples and that the Conservatives should have a free vote. I spoke about the subject on 16 May, and voted contrary to my party's desire on 20 May. It would be wholly inconsistent of me to say now, "My party says I must vote in a particular way, so I must reverse all my earlier decisions". It would be particularly perverse of me to do so, given that I adopted a view in the absence of a view on my party's Front Bench and had to take an initiative, along with the hon. Member for Wakefield, to embark on that path.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Many of us who disagree with my hon. Friend agree profoundly that this is free-vote territory, and that it was quite wrong to impose a three-line Whip.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for punctuating that section of my speech with a full stop. I am always glad when I can agree with him.

Mr. Bercow: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the justifications for the imposition of a three-line Whip on this occasion is: "We did it last time; we could have allowed a free vote but we did not, and it would look bad to change tack now"? Does my hon. Friend agree that it is more important to be right than to be consistent, and that in any case it is more important to be consistent with what was right at the Conservative party conference in Bournemouth than to be consistent with what was wrong in May?

Mr. Lansley: My hon. Friend leads me into difficult territory. I can only say that for me to change tack now would constitute a substantial inconsistency. He is right, though. More to the point, I would be voting contrary to my judgment and conscience, and I can only applaud the way in which my hon. Friend is exercising his responsibility to vote according to his judgment and conscience.

I am persuaded of the desirability of pursuing the interests of children, to the extent that couples should be permitted to adopt. The question that some will remember from the debates on 16 and 20 May is whether that should mean all couples, regardless of whether they consist of a man and woman living together or of two people of the same sex. I am not persuaded, as I was not persuaded then, that we should necessarily extend the possibility of adoption to same-sex couples, not principally for any of the reasons advanced in the House of Lords but because I wonder whether we should create a set of circumstances in which the state can give children the prospect of having two legal fathers or two legal mothers, rather than one of two other prospects that natural circumstances would otherwise allow—that of having a mother and a father, and that of having a single legal parent who happens to be in a long-lasting relationship.

Ms Dari Taylor: Is the hon. Gentleman really saying that it is better for a child to be in one care establishment after another than to be adopted by unmarried or gay parents?

Mr. Lansley: No. I would hope that the hon. Lady would gather from the context of my argument that I am not saying that. I want to ensure the maximum possible use of adoption as an alternative to institutional care. But—there is always a but—we have to set the framework for those decisions and we cannot set out a hierarchy. We cannot simply say that all married couples should be given priority over all unmarried couples, who should be given priority over same-sex

couples. In individual circumstances it will be right for a person in a same-sex relationship to be the adoptive parent.

In British society today it is a normal outcome for a child to be in a relationship with two adoptive parents who are a man and a woman living together, but for a child to have a legal relationship with both partners in a same-sex relationship would not normally happen and would happen solely at the behest of adoption legislation. That is my problem with the issue.

Dr. Evan Harris: The hon. Gentleman, tonight and previously, has been very clear about his reasons for opposing adoption by same-sex couples. However, he will recognise the conflict with his initial presumption. If we could increase the number of suitable homes for children by allowing adoption by same-sex couples, it would be important to do that, even at the cost—as he sees it—of creating an artificial situation legally with a child having two fathers or two mothers. How does he balance those two sincerely held positions?

Mr. Lansley: The greatest number of potential adopters is among unmarried couples, with a smaller number among same-sex couples. Same-sex couples, when considering adoption as a possibility, will be aware that in natural circumstances only one of them could be the natural parent. For a same-sex couple to care for a child does not require both of them to be parents, because that is not what occurs naturally. For example, if a woman has a child and then enters a same-sex relationship, she would not expect her partner to be the mother of that child. We are talking about normal circumstances.

I admit that I am making fine distinctions, but they are important legally. The preponderant issue is whether adoption should be restricted to married couples and single people, rather than to couples generally, and on that point the burden of the argument lies heavily with the hon. Member for Wakefield and with the conclusion that we have to disagree with the Lords in this amendment. When the matter returns to the other place, it will be for the Lords to decide whether they should think again about their amendment, or to give ground gracefully.

Whatever happens, the Bill should pass later this week. I have no doubt about that, and that should be common ground on both sides of the House and with the other place. Constitutionally, the other place would be well advised to bear in mind the fact that all parties in this House are committed to adoption legislation and that we have always been clear about the desirability of achieving that legislation as quickly as possible. It would be extraordinarily undesirable for the Bill to be put back to a future Session.

When the Lords act as a check on this House, they generally do so as a revising Chamber, to ensure that what we do works and is technically competent, or as a check on the power of the Executive. Neither case applies here. The Bill is technically competent and the original amendment was tabled by Back Benchers on both sides of the House. It is not the Government's amendment. Therefore, the essence of the argument with their Lordships is that we are seeking to express a view on behalf of the country about this current social issue. It must be right that the House of Commons is better at doing that than the House of Lords. I hope that the Lords will give ground gracefully.

7.45 pm

Kevin Brennan: I wish to pay tribute to many of the speeches made in this debate, not least those by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who made a thoughtful contribution, and by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who like myself is short of stature but whose speech cast a long shadow across the Chamber. Worryingly for Labour Members, he perhaps defined a way forward for his own party's attitude to social issues.

I also wish to pay tribute to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench. I have been involved with the Bill from the beginning and have heard many of the eloquent contributions made by him. Today's was no exception. He made a good job of a bad case, unlike the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), who did exactly the opposite in making a bad job of a good case. Indeed, the last time that we discussed the issue, he did equally well.

The Bill is not about political correctness. One has only to consider the names of hon. Members supporting the motions to disagree this evening to see that they are not soft southerners or Islington wine bar politically correct types. Indeed, it would be soft southerners and Islington wine bar types who would run a mile from the motions, because they would be worried about headlines in the *Daily Mail*. That is not the case. The names include my hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield, for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) and for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), who is not a northerner by birth but is Welsh and from the Rhondda valley. Even my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) is a horny-handed son of toil who is able to entertain hon. Members with Kentish drinking songs. So this is not a matter of political correctness. In fact, it has everything to do with common sense.

As has been said many times in the debate, no one has the right to adopt. This debate is about doing what is right for the individual child, not for children in general. The weakness of the Opposition's arguments is that they focus on the child as an abstract concept, not on the individual child and his or her circumstances. The issue is one of common sense. We are not arguing that adoption by unmarried couples is the ideal, but it is wrong to make the ideal the enemy of the good when we are considering the interests of the child.

In pursuing change, we do not have to argue that unmarried people, whatever their sexuality, should be allowed to apply to adopt. They may already adopt—but as individuals. Indeed, they can foster as couples, but they are not allowed to adopt as couples. The opponents of the motion to disagree have not tried to amend the Bill to stop single people adopting. Therefore, their case must be that it is all right for a single person to adopt, even one who has a partner and is in a stable relationship, but it is not okay for a couple to adopt, even when they are assessed to be in a long-term, stable and loving relationship. That leaves the

[Kevin Brennan]

opponents of the motion to disagree with only a statistical argument about the rate of failure of unmarried couples' relationships, but they have no moral argument to make.

The statistics that opponents of the motion are advancing are deeply flawed, because they are not comparing the right samples. They are considering only the generality of statistics on unmarried couples. They are not looking at the unmarried couples who are putting themselves forward as adopters. They are not comparing the level of failure of relationships between unmarried couples and the number of children who are in institutional care. For some children, institutional care can be the right thing. From time to time, it may be right for certain children to be in care, but the overwhelming evidence is that it is better for them to be adopted.

I shall cut short my remarks because I know that other hon. Members want to speak and I want to be helpful to them. I have studied the debates in the House of Lords, and I believe that for some this argument is about the fear of a gay contagion, as if somehow it is possible for children who are adopted by unmarried or same-sex unmarried couples—such occurrences are very rare and will still be rare when the Bill is passed—to catch homosexuality from their adoptive parents. That is absurd, but it seems to be an underlying factor. It is impossible, of course, to catch homosexuality from parents, since, by definition, the parents of homosexuals are heterosexual.

Mr. Bryant: Mostly.

Kevin Brennan: For the most part, as my hon. Friend says. However, the fear of that happening is an underlying theme throughout this argument.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Buckingham on his courage and integrity in supporting the motion to disagree tonight and sacrificing so much in doing so.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): He has not sacrificed much.

Kevin Brennan: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has not sacrificed so much—I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) says. The hon. Gentleman's attitude contrasts starkly with that of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who speaks on Welsh affairs for the Conservative party. The hon. Gentleman has chosen to be on an oil rig in the middle of the North sea rather than face the prospect of trooping through the Division Lobbies with his party this evening.

It is incredible that in the 21st century, a so-called modern political party should seek to corral the individual consciences of its Members of Parliament in the way that the Conservative party has done tonight. It is not worthy of being called the nasty party, because that suggests that what its members do is based on an ideology or a Machiavellian plan to get back into power. Perhaps the remarks that I understand were made recently by the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) in the 1922 committee about Gerald Ratner's description of his company might be a more suitable description of the Conservatives than the nasty party.

Andrew Selous: I support my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) in resisting the motion to disagree. I have listened with great interest to the speeches this evening. I do not dispute the motivation or sincerity of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who have spoken in support of the motion; I simply ask that they extend the same courtesy to me as I try to make my case.

I believe, as we all do, that adopted children deserve the very best possible environment. We are all united on that—there is no dispute between us. Clause 1(2) states:

"The paramount consideration of the court or adoption agency must be the child's welfare".

We all agree on that. Then come the three words "throughout his life", and that is the aspect on which I wish to concentrate.

Labour Members have criticised the statistics, but I would like to come to the defence of the statistics. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) referred to Disraeli's dictum about lies, damned lies and statistics. However, we know that married couples are more likely to stay together than unmarried couples. We know that the average length of cohabitation is only two years. We know that 83 per cent. of cohabitations will break up within 10 years. I am sure that everybody—married couples, unmarried couples or same-sex couples— starts their relationship hoping that it will be permanent. No one enters a relationship hoping anything else. However, we know from the statistics and the evidence, which we are not here to dispute tonight, that married relationships provide the most permanent form of security, and that is what we are concerned about for adopted children. Of course unmarried and same-sex couples start out intending their relationship to be permanent but, sadly, that does not prove to be the case.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: The hon. Gentleman mentions statistics. Is it not the case that many cohabiting couples have no intention of remaining together and have no children to care for? It is therefore misleading to compare them with married couples, who may well have children and may want them.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. However, I think that my argument is backed up by the fact that cohabiting couples are, sadly, six and a half times more likely than married couples to split up after the birth of a child. I am concerned about permanence and continuing stability for these very damaged children. That is not to make any judgment about what people do in their private life. I do not believe that anyone in this country is a second-class citizen, as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham seemed to imply some of us might believe. Parliament deciding who has the care of adopted children is different from private individuals making their own choices.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): With respect, it is not Parliament that is making the decision in individual

cases but the courts. Rather than referring to generalities, why does the hon. Gentleman not concede the power to the court to look at each case, make its own assessment in respect of each child and reach a considered decision? He is seeking to deprive the courts of that right.

Andrew Selous: We deal with generalities in this place. I dare say that some young children of 12 or 13 years old would be perfectly capable of driving a car or exercising positions of responsibility, but we do not allow them that right. There are many issues on which this House, quite properly, generalises.

Dr. Evan Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Selous: No, I wish to make progress.

I have some sympathy with the arguments advanced by the Labour peer Lord Alli in the other place. He believes that married couples should have preference over unmarried couples, who, in turn, should have preference over homosexual couples. If there were a degree of hierarchy supporting the status of marriage, that could usefully be considered.

We need to think seriously tonight before we support the motion that will overturn the decisions taken in the House of Lords. There is a considerable body of concern about what the Government are planning to do.

8 pm

Ivan Massow, a prominent gay business man, has expressed concern about gay adoption. He is worried about what might happen in the playground, where children might not be politically correct. The same view is held by Michael Brown, a former Conservative MP, who is also homosexual.

Dr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Bryant *rose—*

Andrew Selous: I want to make a little progress.

I have also been influenced by the debate in the House of Lords in which the Bishop of Winchester clearly explained why the Lords should agree to their amendment. My own bishop, the Bishop of St. Albans, has concerns. Members of many churches in my constituency are anxious about what will happen this evening.

Contrary to the remarks of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), opinion polls conducted not by disreputable organisations but by ICM showed that 71 per cent. of parents have grave concerns about adoption by same-sex couples.

We know that most European countries do not allow what we are proposing to do. We know that the Government, on five occasions, have argued against the proposals. The Foreign Secretary has made such arguments strongly. Indeed, when the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), commented on the adoption law review, she did not agree with the proposals that we are discussing. We know that 23 Labour peers disagree with the proposals, as does the leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords.

Many Members have rightly asked how we can widen the pool of people who are prepared to adopt. We have heard harrowing stories from hon. Members on both sides of the House about children who need to be adopted. I pay tribute to colleagues, such as the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), who have had the courage to adopt. We need to enlarge the pool of people who are prepared to take that courageous decision.

We need a massive advertising campaign to tell people about adoption. We need to give adoptive parents much greater support. I am prepared to put my money where my mouth is and, as a Conservative, to advocate that my constituents and I should pay higher taxes to support those who would be prepared to adopt children.

That is the way forward. We need a positive campaign to persuade more married couples to adopt. We need to remove some of the procedures. My hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) pointed out that although about 29,000 people responded to a BBC programme on adoption, only a few went on with the process. We should take away unnecessary barriers to adoption.

That is how we shall extend the pool so that we can ensure that seriously damaged children, who deserve a stable, loving family home, receive the support that they so desperately need.

Mr. Dawson: Although I have been listening to the debate for four and a half hours, I am still a bit ambivalent about it. I realise that this has been a grand parliamentary occasion and that there have been excellent contributions from both sides. However, I am worried that it could provide the media with another opportunity to characterise the whole of an excellent Bill by one provision, rather than by the major developments in adoption work that the measure will bring about.

I am sorry that other speakers have not sufficiently emphasised the quality of the Bill. It will extend the number of people who will be keen to adopt because it will support them better. It will provide the support that adoptive parents need, the lack of which led to the breakdown of many placements in the past. Assessment and recruitment will be better. The focus will be on ensuring that good practice is developed throughout the country.

The debate has been very good indeed. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) who made a remarkable speech. It is appropriate to congratulate him on both his speech and his forthcoming marriage. There has been the usual social work debate, characterised by the tedious contributions of my colleagues—some of whom have not had as much social work experience as me and some of whom have had many more years experience than me, but they lay on with a trowel the length of time that they have worked for social services.

People have also compared the length of time that they have been married. I am pleased to point out to the hon. Member for Buckingham, who brought up the subject, that I have been married for much longer than

[Mr. Dawson]

my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). By the time of the marriage of the hon. Member for Buckingham, I shall have been married for 29 years. The hon. Gentleman probably faces the same amount of time on the bleak wastes of the Opposition Benches if he continues his current political trajectory. However, after his speech this evening, I can assure him that there is a place for him in the next Government recruitment campaign for social workers. He gave a magnificent exposition of the qualities of that fine profession.

This is a serious debate and it is right and proper that Labour Members have a free vote. It is a matter of conscience. The adoption process is complex. Not only is there intensely difficult work to assess prospective adopters, but there is also the matching of children and young people who have been through appalling experiences, which would knock all of us sideways, in appropriate placements.

I want to give the House a word of caution, indeed censure. It is vital that we realise that adoption is part of a system. We talk about the desirability of adopting 5,000 children who are in care, but there are actually 55,000 children in care. Most of them will go back to their homes, which I welcome; we need to improve the facilities for working with families. However, many of them will remain in foster care, so I was distressed to hear some of the descriptions of foster care during the debate.

Long-term and short-term fostering are important options for children, as is residential care. The Government have performed magnificently by investing in all those forms of care. They have developed policy throughout the whole care system nationwide and various initiatives are being implemented.

I was a few minutes late for the debate because I was at the launch of a splendid initiative launched by A Voice for the Child in Care, which will ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard more and more as opportunities are transformed in children's services. We should acknowledge both the value of the whole care system and that each part of it should be developed to provide for the needs of children.

We are talking about the needs of children. This is a matter of conscience. Members who are minded to vote with the House of Lords and indeed the Members of that place should search their consciences.

Whatever well founded principles one has about marriage or Christian principles governing the way that people should live their lives, it cannot be right to put them above the individual needs of children who require placements. We require an extraordinary range of talents and different placements for the many children who need to be adopted. We must ensure that the needs of children who require adoptive placements are met.

I cannot think it right that any Member of the House or the other place puts even well established and firmly held principles above the needs of individual children. Surely we cannot say that any individual child should lose out on the lifetime opportunity of stability and family life because we think that we should put off a decision until we have got the law right, that we should stand on our principles about marriage, or that we should put anything before the needs of individual children. My vote tonight is with the children.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): Once again, we have had a very good and well considered debate on this issue. The majority of hon. Members who have spoken have made it clear that, as the Government believe, our only consideration should be what is in the best interests of the child. That fundamental principle, which derives from the Children Act 1989, is enshrined, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said, in the Bill's very first clause.

The Government's objective in the Bill and in the action that we have taken since the Prime Minister's review of adoption is to increase the number of children who have the opportunity through adoption to grow up as part of a loving, stable and permanent family, and there are encouraging signs that our drive to increase adoption is working. The number of children adopted from care is increasing. Nearly 3,100 children were adopted from care last year—1,200 more than in 1997.

The Bill and all the improvements that it will bring to the adoption system and the money that we are investing in the adoption service and improving adoption support can only build on that progress. Although the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) agreed that that was important, he seemed to argue that, somehow, this was a case of either taking forward the action that the Government already have in train or supporting the amendments in lieu of the Lords amendments. Of course that is not the case.

As many hon. Members have said, the ability to widen the pool of adopters that the amendments in lieu would provide is a very important part of what the Government are trying to do in relation to adoption, but it is worth taking up a few of the points that hon. Members made about what more we need to do to encourage adopters.

First, the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) suggested that, we had not properly tackled the need to ensure that families came forward and that we were putting delays into the system. I have to repeat to him that the key point in the adoption standards, which form the basis for all our work, is that children will be matched with families who can best meet their needs and that they will not be left waiting indefinitely for a perfect family.

The hon. Gentleman also reiterated his view that the Bill will require an ethnic match and that that will hold up the ability for children to be adopted. That is just not true; as we have frequently said, clause 1(5) will simply require that, when placing children for adoption, the agency

"must give due consideration to the child's . . . racial origin and cultural and linguistic background."

That cannot override the duty in clause 1(3) to bear in mind the fact that delay is likely to prejudice welfare. We have the clear requirement in the national standards.

8.15 pm

I have some sympathy with those hon. Members who have expressed concern about the way in which the

assessment process is carried out. Of course that is why we are also undertaking a fundamental review of the assessment process, to ensure that prospective adopters have better education and information, that there is more consistency and transparency in the process, and that we are clear when people come forward as prospective adopters about what will be asked of them.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) called for recruitment activities to be supported, and we are already providing such support. Under the Bill, we will introduce an independent review for possible adopters who are turned down by adopter panels, to provide more certainty about the process.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) called for tax rises to help adoption support. I do not remember him and other Conservative Members voting for the investment outlined in the Budget. Nevertheless, the Government are investing £70 million in improved adoption support, which will enable people to come forward with more certainty that they will have the support that they need to take on some of those very difficult children. So we are making progress, but there is no room for complacency.

As we have heard, BAAF estimates that 5,000 new adoptive parents are needed every year. It says that there is no shortage of adopters for very young children, but they represent only one in every nine children adopted, and we recognise that and several hon. Members have made that point.

Many hon. Members have referred to BAAF's publication, "Be My Parent", and to the fact that, in one month alone, 431 children appeared and that there were 1,255 inquiries about them, but the crux of the matter is that 65 of those individuals and 64 groups of siblings received no inquiry at all. As many hon. Members have very powerfully said, no one felt able to express an interested in adopting the eight-year-old boy who is interested in football and swimming and is lively but who has mild learning disabilities and has been in care for the past four years. No one felt able to offer the stable family life that children need so much to the five-year-old boy who is keen on computer games, bicycling and dogs but who was taken into care at the age of one. That is the basis of my support for the amendments in lieu of the Lords amendments—measures that will make a difference to the possible pool of those who can provide a family life to those children.

In supporting my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, I should like to point out that amendments (a) to (uu) in lieu would complete the changes necessary to the Bill that are consequent on the decision to allow unmarried couples to adopt jointly. Those amendments fall into three main groups. The first group contains those amendments that would replace references throughout the Bill to "married couple", "step-parents" and "persons to whom the adopter is married" with references to "couple", "two-people adopters", "partner" and "partner of a parent", and insert the new definitions of "couple" and "partner" in relation to a parent in the glossary contained in schedule 6.

The second group contains amendments that would ensure that adopted people have a clear legal status, irrespective of whether adopted before or after the Bill is enacted or whether by a married couple, a single adopter or an unmarried couple. The amendments would enable relationships created by adoption to be described in law as adoptive relationships, and they would also preserve the status of people adopted prior to the Bill.

The third group contains amendments to adoption and other legislation consequent on the changes to the legal status of adopted people. When the House votes, as I hope that it does, for the principle of allowing unmarried people to adopt, that will ensure that the necessary consequential amendments are included. I want to make it clear that the House will have an opportunity to vote on all the amendments in the group. I want to ensure that the House has a chance to express its views on these and any amendments in lieu where appropriate. In addition, I would move any outstanding motions to disagree to Lords amendments if and when the knife falls—

Dr. Evan Harris: Will the hon. Lady clarify a point that was raised over four and a half hours ago about whether the Government agree with the Joint Committee on Human Rights? The Committee concluded:

"As amended at Report stage in the House of Lords, the Bill may . . . no longer be compatible with the right of children to have their best interests treated as the paramount consideration under CRC Article 23, and is likely to be incompatible with the rights of unmarried couples, wishing to be considered jointly as potential adoptive parents, to be free from discrimination under ECHR Article 14 combined with Article 8, and under ICCPR Article 26."

Jacqui Smith: The Government took legal advice when the Bill was introduced in the House of Commons, which was that the position in the 1976 Act and in the Bill as it then stood was, on balance, defensible on ECHR grounds. As we have heard, the Committee has now given its view that the Bill as amended by the Lords is incompatible with convention rights, and the Government do not necessarily accept the reasoning of the Committee. We recognise, however, as we always have, that in the light of developing case law—not least some of that cited by the hon. Gentleman—there is a risk that the current law and the Bill as it stands would be found to be incompatible. Clearly, much will depend on the circumstances of individual cases. I shall now return to the key issues.

Much has been said about the propensity of unmarried relationships to break down—that was a key part of the arguments of the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). We are not suggesting, however, that all unmarried couples or all same-sex couples should have a right to adopt. We are simply saying that these couples should have the same right to be assessed jointly as prospective adopters as that enjoyed by married couples.

Mr. Brazier: Will the Minister give way?

Jacqui Smith: No.

When considering the suitability of couples as adopters, agencies and the courts are not assessing from the public at large but from a small self-selecting group

[Jacqui Smith]

who have decided that they would like to adopt. Incidentally, we should be grateful to and encourage that group of people, not label them as being concerned about making a lifestyle choice, as the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) did at the weekend.

The overall statistics are not, therefore, a helpful guide. People who are in casual, short-term relationships are most unlikely to put themselves forward as prospective adopters, and if they did, they would certainly not advance beyond the first stage of the approval process. The key is in the assessment process, which ensures that we can identify with confidence those single people and couples that have the qualities needed to be successful adoptive parents. Adoption is about making judgments about suitability and judgements based on evidence, not judgments based on generalisation and—dare I say it—sometimes prejudice. One cannot use generalisation to determine assessment—that is not acting in the best interests of children. One can, however, assess each prospective adopter on their own merits so that an informed decision can be taken as to their suitability to offer a home to a vulnerable child. That is why the adopter assessment process is critical, and the assessment process is tough. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn), and in the brave and wise speech of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), which reflected the in-depth analysis that he has undertaken of this issue.

We have spelled out in the framework for assessment, which is currently out for consultation, the tough questions that will need to be asked about the stability and security of the relationship of any couple coming forward to be potential adopters. The sorts of issues that social workers will seek to discuss with them will be about the history of their current relationship and any previous relationships, what makes that relationship work, whether the relationship has been severely tested and survived, how the couple go about resolving difficulties, how they perceive commitment, where they see themselves in 20 years' time, how decisions are made within the partnership, how conflict is dealt with in the relationship, and whether both partners support each other and meet each others' needs. We are asking whether people believe that those are the crucial factors that need to be discussed. It seems to me that that is a tough and rigorous approach to ensuring that we make clear that couples who come forward to adopt will be in very stable relationships. That is the toughness of the assessment that hon. Members have outlined today.

Some have seen these amendments as an attack on marriage. That is rubbish. My marriage is not made stronger by knowing that the loving, caring and skilled potential parents down the road are prevented from offering a home to a child because they are not married. Marriage is not the strong institution that I believe it to be if it has to be protected by limiting the life chances of vulnerable children.

Many Members have rightly argued that what we need to ensure for children is stability and security. Of course, single people, including gay people, can already adopt. They have been able to do so since 1926. Some of them will be in long-term relationships, and the assessment process already considers the nature of those relationships. What the reforms will do is enable adopted children to have a long-term legal relationship with two parents. I fail to see how that undermines security and stability. Children have written to the Department of Health outlining some of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) about the security that comes from a legal relationship with two parents. The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw), demonstrated the illogicality of the position that opposes these reforms.

Mr. Brazier: Will the Minister give way?

Jacqui Smith: No.

The hon. Member for Canterbury would accept a child being adopted by one member of a gay relationship but would resist the stability that allowing both to have a legal relationship with that child would ensure.

Mr. Brazier: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not a convention of the House that if the Member speaking refers to a Member who is present in the Chamber, who then seeks to intervene, he or she gives way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I remind the hon. Gentleman that when a Member is winding up a debate, it is usual for him or her to refer to numerous Members.

Jacqui Smith: Hon. Members would have been disappointed if I had not referred to them.

This debate is about making difficult but fundamental choices for children. It is about whether our adoption system should be based on the needs of individual children and families or on dogma backed up by dodgy statistics. It is about whether we focus on the reality of modern children and families or on outdated visions of a supposedly perfect family life. It is about whether more children are adopted or whether they end up staying in care. The alternatives for the children whom I mentioned earlier are not to be adopted by a married couple or to be adopted by an unmarried couple, but to be adopted or to stay in care.

For some Members, the choice is between being nice or nasty. Of course, Labour Members are free to vote to be nice, but Conservative Members have been whipped to be nasty, and there have been times in the debate when it has felt rather like intruding on private grief. This is a difficult issue, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out on Second Reading. We said that we would listen; we have listened and that is why these reforms are being introduced. I repeat: nobody has a right to adopt—

It being half-past Eight o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The House divided: Ayes 344, Noes 145.

Division No. 345] **[8:30 am**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curry, rh David
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, rh Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maude, rh Francis
Meacher, rh Michael
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian

Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Kevin Brennan and Jonathan Shaw

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Crausby, David
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dodds, Nigel
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
MacDonald, Calum
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Pollard, Kerry
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Chris Grayling and Mr. Laurence Robertson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 32 to 36 and 66 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (uu) in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 26, 32 to 36 and 66 agreed to.

Clause 2

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 3, line 16, leave out from "information" to end of line 18 and insert

"and

(b) any other services prescribed by regulations, in relation to adoption.

( ) The power to make regulations under subsection (6)(b) is to be exercised so as to secure that local authorities provide financial support."

8.45 pm

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 25, 27 to 31, 37, 38, 42, 43, 45, 47, 50 to 57, 62 to 65, 67 to 91, 98 to 101, 103 and 105 to 107.

Jacqui Smith: We come to a group of mostly minor and technical amendments—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will Members leaving the Chamber please do so as quickly as possible so that the debate can continue?

Jacqui Smith: There are 80 amendments in this group. I would be more than willing to go through them one by one, but perhaps I shall just give hon. Members the high points to begin with. Included in the group are amendments to the Bill's provisions on placements, voluntary adoption agencies, access to information and advocacy services. Many of the amendments were tabled by the Government in response to the views expressed by peers when the Bill was considered in the other place.

Lords amendments Nos. 14 to 24, 30, 31 and 80 make changes to the provisions in chapter 3 covering placement of children for adoption, principally to ensure that placements of young babies are properly covered, but in addition to improve arrangements for relatives and others to obtain contact orders for children who are placed for adoption.

Lords amendments Nos. 14, 17 to 22, 24 and 31 ensure that children who are placed for adoption when under six weeks of age are explicitly covered by the provisions in chapter 3, that the arrangements for getting contact orders also apply to them, and that parents' rights to request the return of their child from any voluntary baby placement are clearly set out in the Bill so that there can be no doubt. Amendment No. 31 also ensures that it is possible to make a placement order in respect of a baby under six weeks, and that that order will be a valid basis for a later adoption order. That is to allow for the placement for adoption of young babies in cases where the parents do not consent.

On contact, amendments Nos. 14 and 15 improve the provisions in clause 25 for contact orders where children are placed for adoption. They allow relatives, including siblings, to apply for a placement contact order without needing the leave of the court. They also give the same rights to people who had Children Act 1989 orders for contact with the child before the child was placed for adoption. Amendment No. 30 to clause 46 ensures that the court can make adoption orders where a child has no parents. Amendment No. 80 to schedule 3 ensures that children looked after by local authorities can be placed for adoption across borders in the UK without the specific permission of their natural parents.

A second group of amendments relate to voluntary adoption agencies. Amendment No. 81 amends the Care Standards Act 2000 to provide that voluntary adoption agencies do not have to register each branch separately. That is because, under the Adoption Act 1976 and the Bill, voluntary adoption agencies must be incorporated bodies. I am sure that hon. Members will remember from our discussions that adoption agencies must be incorporated bodies because they have significant responsibilities, which may include parental responsibility for a child. Incorporated bodies are separate and distinct from the individual members of the body, and therefore provide a much clearer definition of where the responsibilities for the child lie.

Amendment No. 12 inserts a new clause which ensures that each registration authority under the Care Standards Act—the National Care Standards Commission and the National Assembly for Wales—has the appropriate level of scrutiny over the activity of agencies operating in their area.

The remaining amendments, Nos. 43, 63, 67, 84 to 91 and 103, are consequential on those two key amendments. For example, they ensure that under the 1976 Act, the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales may make joint regulations by making the regulation-making powers appropriate-Minister powers. That may be necessary as these regulations will make provision relating to the regulation of the way voluntary adoption agencies are run. Given that voluntary adoption agencies will be cross-border bodies, it may be appropriate that these regulations are made jointly.

I move on to the amendments dealing with access to information. All hon. Members who have followed the passage of the Bill throughout its stages up till now will know that access to information is a subject about which there has been much discussion. Amendment No. 42 builds on amendments tabled by the Opposition on Report in another place. Those reflect some of the arguments made so strongly and effectively by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) throughout the Bill's passage through this place.

The Government acknowledge that the Opposition's amendments sought to tackle our concerns that adoption agencies should not be burdened with work that would draw their resources away from arranging and supporting adoptions for today's children, if we ensured that it was easier for people adopted before the new access to information provisions in the Bill came into operation to gain information about other people involved in the adoption.

Amendment No. 42 provides through regulations for registered adoption support agencies to operate an intermediary service for contact between adopted adults and their adult birth relatives. Adoption stakeholders welcomed the amendment. Adoption support agencies will be able to access identifying information relating to past adoptions from the registrar-general and from adoption agencies. We intend to ensure through regulations that there are safeguards to protect that information, and to provide for it to be disclosed only if the informed consent of the adopted adult is forthcoming. The amendment inserts a new clause after clause 95 and amplifies the power in clause 9 to make regulations for the disclosure of information in relation to adoptions made before the Bill is enacted. Lords amendments Nos. 4, 8 and 70 are consequential on Lords amendment No. 42. It is the Government's firm intention to use the regulations to establish the scheme and set out the details in regulations after consultation with adoption stakeholders.

Kevin Brennan: I thank my hon. Friend for referring to my small part in this process, and I pay tribute to the Government for listening to the points that I made on Second Reading and in amendments tabled in the Special Standing Committee and other stages of the Bill's passage, and for listening to the Opposition when they picked up the proposals. I praise her for her handling of the matter. I am sure that the incorporation of the amendments in the Bill will be due in no small part to her listening approach.

Jacqui Smith: That is nice of my hon. Friend and very sweet of him. It is right that the Government listened, but considerable pressure was exerted, for which he not least was responsible. Without turning the debate into a love-in, I believe that the amendments are a good example of effective scrutiny of legislation by a Government who have been willing to listen.

[Jacqui Smith]

The final amendments relate to advocacy services. Lords amendment No. 47 inserts a new clause that introduces new section 26A into the Children Act 1989 in relation to advocacy services. As we have considered the provisions, and especially improvements to the complaints procedure in relation to children, many hon. Members have argued about the need to ensure not only that children's voices are heard, but that children are adequately represented and supported, especially at the very difficult time of making complaints. Once again, my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) has played a very important part, as he always does, in pushing for such development.

New section 26A to the Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to make arrangements for assistance, including representation, to looked-after children and young people leaving care who make or intend to make complaints under sections 24D and 26 of that Act. It also provides for regulations to specify who must not provide the assistance. That will enable regulations to ensure the independence of that service. Other regulations may be made under section 26A relating to how the service must be provided and the actions that local authorities must take to monitor its compliance with the regulations. Finally, the new section provides that local authorities must publicise the service as they consider appropriate.

This series of amendments tabled in the other place and supported by the Government in some cases improves the Bill even further and in many cases brings about the necessary technical and consequential changes attendant on those decisions in these very important areas.

Tim Loughton: The Minister promised us some high points and we have just had a few. It is a shame that more of the 493 hon. Members who were with us only 15 minutes ago have not stayed on to listen to an explanation of these very important amendments, which have improved the Bill in great measure in all the areas that she mentioned.

I am particularly pleased with the improvements that have been made in respect of placements for young babies. With regard to the necessary changes on contact orders and parents' rights—points that we raised in Committee and on Report—the Government have listened and accepted the relevant amendments in another place.

9 pm

There are the changes regarding voluntary adoption agencies, and we have had debates about the incorporation of those bodies. Access to information changes were rightly raised, in the first instance, in Committee by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan), and supported by the Opposition. The issues were raised more forcefully on Report. Several adoption agencies were consulted. We were talking about people who had given up children for adoption as far back as 1926 as well as people who had given up children similarly very recently. There was a span of three quarters of a century during which birth relatives, in many instances, had the last opportunity to make contact with children given up for adoption, often under duress, in difficult circumstances, especially during post-war years.

The Bill was their last chance. I am pleased to say that almost at the 11th hour the Government have listened to objections from Members, adoption agencies and many individual mothers, who I know have written in and contacted their Member of Parliament. It is a credit to the Government that they have found ways of overcoming real practical problems that the Minister outlined on Report. The problems include agency records that are incomplete and the not inconsiderable extra demands that acquiring information could place on adoption agencies. That is setting aside all the extra work that we are expecting the agencies to do to increase the numbers of people coming forward to adopt. There are difficulties in locating people after many years while using old records. There is, of course, a huge potential demand for the service.

No-one pretends that the process will be easy, but the principle was right. If the Government have found a way of putting the principle into effect, I am delighted. More importantly, many thousands of birth mothers over many years—many of them are in their twilight years—will be eternally grateful to all those who have enabled the amendments to be brought about.

Mr. Lansley: I take the opportunity to express my appreciation of the work that my hon. Friend has undertaken on consideration of the Bill. He and I have not agreed on absolutely everything at every stage, but on the great majority of issues I admire the diligence with which he has gone about his task and the improvements that have resulted from his scrutiny and interventions. The access-to-information provisions are a good example of that. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend.

Tim Loughton: There we are. The occupants of both Front Benches have now had a love-in, so we are all equal. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We have not agreed on absolutely everything, but he has been an assiduous follower of the Bill. He was not a member of the Committee, but he knows about the practicalities of some of the things that we needed to do to improve the adoption support service, regardless of the debate that took place earlier.

The Minister grouped together the amendments relating to advocacy services. It is natural that following the improvements to the complaints procedure, which took up a deal of time of hon. Members in Committee, children's voices need to heard rather more loudly than in the past. Many of us made that point on Report. It is right that there should be a duty on local authorities to make assistance available, and it is right also that it should be publicised. I know from the experience of my district's advocacy service in Adur that excellent work is done. It is often unappreciated and unheard of, but the work is expanding enormously, not least in the areas of health and social services. The work is directed not least to help elderly people who are faced with a barrage of problems relating to access to health care benefits, for example. It is right that these services should be extended and that resources should be made available to deal with children's issues in the context of adoption.

There is no point in being churlish. It is a time to rejoice in many of the great improvements that have been made during the Bill's passage. From the early

stages when the Committee started its deliberations, improvements have been made. They did not happen immediately, and the Opposition were not necessarily credited with them at the time, but we can all share in the Bill's success and many of the improvements. The amendments are key contributions and I have great pleasure in supporting them.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 25, 27 to 31, and 37 and 38 agreed to.

Clause 82

RESTRICTION ON BRINGING CHILDREN IN

Lords amendment: No. 39, in page 45, line 31, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b).

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 40 and 41, Government amendments (a), (b) and (c) thereto, 58, Government amendment (a) thereto, 59 to 61, Government amendment (a) thereto, 92, 93, Government amendment (a) thereto, 94, 95, 96, Government amendment (a) thereto, 97, 102 and 104.

Jacqui Smith: The group focuses on the application of intercountry adoption provisions to parents, relatives, guardians and step-parents, and provides for the time that the child must live with the adopters before an adoption order can be made.

First, let me deal with the time that the child should live with the adopters. Section 13 of the Adoption Act 1976 provides that, when the applicant is a parent, step-parent or relative of the child, or the child is placed by an adoption agency, or in pursuance of an order of the High Court, the child must be placed with the applicants for 13 weeks before the adoption order can be made. In cases of intercountry adoptions, which are not agency placements, the child must live with the applicants for 12 months. Clause 41 sets out the residence periods in the Bill.

For non-agency placements, for which clause 41 does not provide elsewhere, the residence period is three out of the previous five years. However, clause 82(6)(a) enables regulations to provide that clauses in chapter 3 apply with modifications or do not apply to children who are brought in under clause 82. Hon. Members will remember that, to improve the safeguards for intercountry adoption, we intend to use that power to provide that the child must live with the applicants for six months when the correct procedures have been followed and 12 months when they have not.

When clause 82 does not apply, the standard residence period in clause 41 will apply. However, it is intended that clause 82 will apply to all but a limited group of people. The exceptions are likely to be, for example, parents in prescribed circumstances. Under clause 41, the residence period for parents is 10 weeks.

The amendments are intended to make clear the residence periods that should apply to convention adoptions and to ensure that the same modification powers are available for early implementation of the restrictions on intercountry adoption. In summary, whenever the correct procedures have been followed, we intend that the child should live with the adopters for six months. That would ensure that the children had time to adjust and settle with their new families, and that the local authority had been able to monitor the placement satisfactorily before the court made the order.

As I said earlier, when the correct procedures have not been followed, we intend that the child should be required to live with the adopters for a minimum of 12 months to allow the child to settle with the new family and the local authority to assess the family fully in lieu of the checks that should have been made before the child came to live with the family.

I turn now to the amendments that deal with the issue of to whom the provisions on intercountry adoption should apply. Hon. Members will remember the structure of clause 82, which relates to restrictions on such adoptions. In their previous form, the provisions ensured that parents and relatives were excluded from those restrictions. We have received representations from intercountry adoption stakeholder groups expressing concern about intercountry adoption by relatives. They have suggested that, at present, the welfare of the child is not paramount, because these cases are treated predominantly as an immigration issue rather than an adoption matter.

The groups have raised concern about the lack of preparation undertaken by relatives adopting from overseas, and about the fact that relatives do not have their suitability to adopt assessed unless the child's home country requires it. They have made it clear that this means that we cannot be sure that those relatives will provide a safe, secure environment for the child. We have listened carefully to the issues that they have raised, and we believe that this is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

Clauses 82, 84 and 128 of the Bill, the transitional provision in paragraph 10 of schedule 4, and section 56 of the Adoption Act 1976 place restrictions on the circumstances in which children may be brought into the UK or taken out of the UK for the purposes of adoption. At present, those restrictions include the requirement for a person wishing to bring a child into the country for the purpose of adoption to be assessed and approved by an adoption agency, and for a person wishing to take a child out of the country for the purpose of adoption to be in receipt of an order permitting this. However, these safeguards do not apply when the prospective adopters are the child's natural parents, natural relatives, guardians or step-parents.

In the light of the concerns that stakeholders have raised, we have returned to the case for exempting those groups, and come to the conclusion that something should be done to address the issue. The approach that we have taken, through the amendments, is to remove the specific exemption of parents, guardians, relatives and step-parents from the provisions that set out the restrictions. Then, in each case, a regulation-making power has been taken to enable us to prescribe that the provisions setting out restrictions on bringing a child in or removing a child are not to apply—or, in the case of taking the child out of the country for the purposes of adoption, are to apply with modification—to parents, guardians, relatives and step-parents. For example, amendment No. 41 inserts a new clause in the Bill

[Jacqui Smith]

containing such regulation-making powers in relation to clauses 82 and 84. This reflects the need to be flexible and to be careful that we do not impose these restrictions inappropriately. Using those regulation-making powers will provide the necessary flexibility to react to changing circumstances. It may become clear through experience and discussions with other countries that it would be inappropriate for certain groups to be included in the restrictions. We intend to consult on who should be exempt from the restrictions, and the use of regulations will allow for the responses to be taken into account.

Amendments Nos. 39 to 41 deal with the position under the Bill. Amendments Nos. 58 to 61 deal with the position under the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978, and amendments Nos. 93 to 96 deal with the position under the Adoption Act 1976. Because the amendments remove the explicit exemption of parents, guardians, relatives and step-parents from the restrictions, this gives us additional powers in relation to residence periods. It means that we will be able to use the regulation-making powers in clause 82 of the Bill, section 50A of the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978 and new section 56A of the Adoption Act 1976 to make regulations to modify the time a child must live with a parent, relative, guardian or step-parent in intercountry adoption cases.

9.15 pm

These are detailed amendments, but our clear intention is to ensure that children being adopted from overseas by parents, relatives, guardians and step-parents are properly safeguarded. We recognise that such children are vulnerable, that they need protecting and that their relatives may need the same assessment of suitability and/or help to prepare for adoption as a stranger planning to adopt a child from overseas. However, we are also clear about the fact that we do not want to impose unworkable restrictions and that we need to take the advice of those working in the field as to any groups that should legitimately be excluded. That is why we have taken care to include in the amendments regulation-making powers that provide the necessary flexibility to react to experience, changes in practice and the views of professionals.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments No. 40 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 41 and Government amendments (a) to (c) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 42 and 43 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 44, before clause 110, to insert the following new clause—"*Orders with respect to children—*

In section 8 of the 1989 Act (residence, contact and other orders with respect to children) there is inserted—

"(5) The Lord Chancellor may make regulations providing for the separate representation of children in specified circumstances relating to any matter arising from proceedings under this section.""

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 48 and 49, the Government motions to disagree thereto and amendment (a) in lieu thereof.

Ms Winterton: First, I must make it clear that in moving motions to disagree with amendments Nos. 44, 48 and 49 made in the other place, the Government are not disagreeing at all with the principle that children should have a say in decision making regarding their future. The Government amendment in lieu seeks to meet the spirit of the amendments made in the other place while eliminating some technical flaws and reducing duplication.

Neither the amendments made in the other place nor the Government amendment would add to the existing powers of the courts or the Lord Chancellor. The courts can already order that a child be made a party and separately represented in any family proceedings. However, we have listened to and respected the views of the House and the other place, and we agree that those powers should be explicitly referred to in primary legislation.

The Government, in tabling their own amendment in lieu of those made in the other place, seek to address three key concerns that have been raised during the passage of the Bill. First, there is too stark a distinction between public law cases in which the state intervenes in a family's life—for example, care proceedings—and private law disputes between individuals. Secondly, the power to provide for the separate representation of children is not referred to explicitly in primary legislation. Thirdly, children should have access to separate representation more frequently than they do at present.

The Government's amendment would make it clear in primary legislation that applications for the making or revocation of a placement order will be specified proceedings as defined by section 41(6) of the Children Act 1989. The child will be a party, a children's guardian will be appointed, and the child will be separately represented in every case. The issue has been raised both here and in the other place. The Government have already said publicly that they will make such proceedings specified; the amendment would embody that commitment in the Bill.

Using Lords amendment No. 49 as a basis, the Government's amendment in lieu provides that proceedings for section 8 orders—such as contact and residence orders—can, in circumstances to be established by rules of court, be designated specified proceedings. That will give us the necessary flexibility to take into account the outcome of planned public consultation on the representation of children in private law proceedings. Using section 64 of the Family Law Act 1996 as a basis, the Government's amendment

amends section 93 of the Children Act, dealing with rules of court, to enable the Lord Chancellor to make rules to provide for the separate representation of children. He has made such provision in the current rules, but the amendment sets his power in primary legislation. That is intended to address Lords amendments Nos. 42 and 48.

The Government's amendment goes wider. It will apply not only to applications for section 8 orders, but to other proceedings under the Children Act—for example, applications for special guardianship orders. It makes it absolutely clear that we have power to specify certain categories of private law proceedings as requiring children to be parties automatically, and to be separately represented. The amendment would place in primary legislation the ability for rules to provide for children's separate representation in private law cases. It goes further than Lords amendment No. 44, as it applies to all proceedings under the Children Act.

Mr. Dawson: What would be the effect on children appearing at adoption hearings? Will they have ready access to separate representation?

Ms Winterton: Not all adoption proceedings will require separate representation. The issue has been much discussed, and I think it is agreed that it will not be appropriate in some cases. We are trying to adopt a belt-and-braces approach to the current situation. We want it to be stated in primary legislation that other circumstances can also be specified in regard to automatic representation.

The amendment should not be seen in isolation. We have already completed a "scoping" study of how children might have a more effective voice in family proceedings. There will be full public consultation, which will begin later this year. That consultation will also address the third concern raised in debates here and in the other place about the need for greater consistency in how the powers available to the courts are used in practice. If necessary, following consultation, we can add to the definition of specified proceedings and use court rules to guide the courts in those cases in which the separate representation of the child may be especially important.

The amendments do not change the existing position. Children may already be separately represented in any family proceedings, but the Government's amendments are intended to make that commitment explicit in primary legislation in order to address the concerns that have been raised. Those changes in primary legislation must not be the end of the story. We need to ensure that the powers provided under the Children Act 1989 work effectively, and that is why we need to have the flexibility to take into account the results of consultation when making court rules. It is important that we listen to the views of children and young people themselves. I ask the House therefore to disagree with Lords amendments Nos. 44, 48 and 49, and to support the Government's amendment in lieu.

Dr. Evan Harris: Strictly on a non-love-in basis, I wish to congratulate both Ministers on the mastery of their briefs and to thank them for their courtesy. I even extend my thanks to the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who has occasionally been courteous to me and was, no doubt, very courteous to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley). She has been promoted out of this portfolio, but wished me to pass on her thanks. [*Interruption.*] I will not be drawn on whether she has escaped or been punished.

I come late to the issue, but I do not intend to oppose the amendments in lieu. However, I wish to raise several points on behalf of those who have supported our campaign. I have received help from the NSPCC, Women's Aid, NCH and the legal department at BAAF in promoting the approach that the Government have now accepted. The original amendments, the spirit of which the Government have accepted, were tabled by Lord Listowel, but were moved by my colleague, Baroness Thomas. We would appreciate some clarification on certain issues: if not now, then in the other place when the original movers of the amendments will have the chance to put their view.

I shall not rehearse the basis of the amendments, because the Minister has done that admirably. I thank the Minister for accepting the thrust of the amendments and, indeed, for going further in some of her amendments in lieu, which are of course more correctly drafted. My first question is whether the necessary and relevant court rules will be made as promptly as possible, because without them the amendments would add nothing to the Bill. The existing framework is in place, so the addition of the court rules would be straightforward. Does the Minister have in mind a timetable for her proposals to consult? We remember section 64 of the Family Law Act 1996, which was never implemented, so people with an interest in the matter will want to see the actual regulations.

The Minister has clarified that children will be full parties in the circumstances in which she envisages that the court will feel that to be appropriate. The children will then have the benefit of both the children's guardian and a solicitor.

9.30 pm

Another question is whether it is appropriate to replace Lords amendment No. 48, which requires the court to have particular regard to

"the wishes and feelings of the child considered in the light of his age and understanding"

and the need for his separate representation. The Minister in the House of Lords who argued against the amendment pointed out that the court has a duty in any case under the checklist in section 1 of the Children Act 1989 to consider the child's wishes and feelings. That is true, but only to a limited extent. Section 1(4) of the Children Act sets out the circumstances in which the court is required to use the checklist, and those circumstances do not include applications by step-parents for parental responsibility orders under new section 4A or for special guardianship orders, which the Minister mentioned, under new section 14A, both of which the Bill inserts in the Children Act. In both cases, it is particularly important that the court has an opportunity to hear the child's wishes in respect of the application.

In the case of applications by a step-parent for parental responsibility, there is to be no requirement for any kind of report from a social worker or children's

[Dr. Evan Harris]

guardian and no easy means for the court to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings unless it is specifically required to inquire into them. Among other things, special guardianship orders place severe restrictions on parents' rights to exercise their parental responsibility and to give special guardians the power to exercise their parental responsibility "to the exclusion of" another person with parental responsibility. It could therefore have more serious consequences than a section 8 order, yet the section 1 checklist is not automatically applied.

I presume that the Government intend that the court should have regard to the child's wishes in both types of application. They will probably say that they will make appropriate provision for consulting the child in the regulations governing local authorities' duties to report to court in respect of special guardianship applications. I accept that, but I fear that even that safeguard is not present in respect of the step-parent applications.

I should be grateful for the Minister's clarification, either now or later, on whether the absence of Lords amendment No. 48 would leave a lacuna in the need for the children's views to be covered in respect of step-parent applications. Otherwise, I am reasonably happy with the Government's proposals and repeat my thanks to them for accepting, after what I understand was an exciting vote in the House of Lords, the principle behind the need to have written into primary legislation the provisions that the Minister has outlined.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): May I add my welcome to the introduction of the proposal, which incorporates the spirit of the amendments that were put forward in another place? Throughout the Bill's proceedings and in the Special Standing Committee, the issues surrounding child protection were focused on the need for an independent voice for the child as well as the protection of children in contact cases. The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), is probably fed up with hearing me talk about that. However, together with the coalition of children's charities and Women's Aid, I welcome the Government's proposals.

The House will not be surprised to learn that the coalition of children's charities is keen that these rules be introduced at the earliest possible opportunity. They believe that there needs to be special consideration of the circumstances for separate representation of children. They have indicated a number of areas that they would like covered in separate representation, such as cases in which implacably adversarial parents create high levels of conflict in which the child's interests are disregarded or where there is a history of violence. As we have said throughout the Bill's proceedings, children are at their most vulnerable when there is violence in the household, and it is vital that their voices are heard as clearly as possible.

The children's charities also believe that separate representation is important where a child is unaware of their relationship with an absent parent; where the court accepts the need for medical or psychological reports on the child in family proceedings; where concerns about the welfare of a child in a family fall short of child protection measures or of a direction under section 37 of the Children Act 1989; where a clear conflict of interest between one or both parents might include conflicts that arise in the future if a child disagrees with court-approved arrangements made some years earlier when the child was young; where a child who was previously the subject of divorce proceedings is going through such proceedings on a second or subsequent occasion; and where there has been unreasonable denial of contact or when a child's parent is to be committed for contempt of a court order issued to allow contact with another parent.

Those are examples of the circumstances that the children's charities want dealt with under the rules at the earliest opportunity. The introduction of an independent voice for children is but one plank in a range of measures to protect children. As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is aware, our special concern is to protect children when there is domestic violence.

My hon. Friend will also be acutely aware that, despite some of those measures, there will still be cases where children are vulnerable. We heard recently from Women's Aid of a child contact order case in which a solicitor had to have alarms installed because of the fear of attack and had to flee the court, alongside the judge, because of the violence of the parent. Despite all that violence, even in the court, the violent parent was granted contact with the child.

That is one example of the many that my noble Friends related to show their concern that we may need further legislation to protect children in such circumstances. I am sure that the independent voice of the child will add to our armoury of protection, but I invite my hon. Friend to acknowledge the concerns of many Members on both sides of the House by assuring us that there will be early consultation on such measures and that, if necessary, there will be further legislation, as was suggested in the other place, to ensure that the full protection of the law is available to children in contact cases where there is domestic violence.

Mr. Dawson: I rise to congratulate my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on the real progress that has been made on separate representation.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) in urging that the section 8 provisions be introduced quickly.At my constituency surgery last Saturday, some worried grandparents told me about contact proceedings in a local court, where the judge had found it necessary to tell an 11-year-old child that he could have her dragged kicking and screaming to a contact session, even though there had been child protection issues and allegations in the past.

I hope that we are dealing with the final aspects of the Bill, so I want to emphasise the importance of separate representation for some children at adoption hearings. I accept the Minister's view that it would not be necessary in all cases—for example, where many problems were sorted out when making the placement order and where young children were involved. However, the fact that so many issues can be sorted out at that stage makes it especially important that some young people have a further opportunity to raise problems at the adoption hearing.

We have acknowledged throughout debates on the Bill and today that adoption is changing; it is a much more open process and much more contact is involved. It is highly likely that many contact issues, particularly those involving older children, will need to be resolved at adoption hearings. That would not necessarily be terribly contentious, but it is important—particularly for contact with siblings, but for contact with the wider family as well—that there should be an opportunity to allow the child's voice to be clearly heard and articulated in court.

9.45 pm

Ms Rosie Winterton: This has been short debate, but, as might be expected, very many important issues have been raised. First, may I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) for his usual wise comments and the experience that he brings to our debates. He is absolutely right to say that it is important that everything possible be done to ensure that the voice of the child is heard in adoption proceedings, but, as he says, of course there may be some cases where separate representation is not appropriate—perhaps the adoption has been undertaken by a family member and all parties, including the child, are happy.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) asked about the timing. We intend to consult on the secondary legislation—the court rules—and hope to do so by the end of this year. There will be a three-month consultation period, following which we will draft rules, and they will be laid before Parliament for 28 days. It is therefore not possible for me to give an absolute guarantee on timing. We have to undertake the consultation; we have to take note of that consultation and ensure that it agrees with what we are proposing, and then it has go through the parliamentary procedure.

The hon. Gentleman raised an issue in connection with Lords amendment No. 48. The courts already have to pay attention to the child's wishes and feelings under section 13 of the Children Act 1989, and section 93 of the Act is also relevant. It is important that we do not duplicate what already appears in primary legislation, and I assure him that the courts have to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child in the light of his or her age and understanding.

The hon. Gentleman also suggested that there is a lacuna in respect of step-parents. We do not believe that such a lacuna exists, but I shall certainly come back to him if one does.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) spoke with her usual passion about consultation and how it relates to contact issues. I hope that I can reassure her by saying that we have specifically asked the stakeholder group looking at cases involving allegations of violence to consider how we take the views of the child into account in those cases. In terms of making certain proceedings specified, we will consider many of the issues that she rightly raised. The group that we will be consulting includes the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, CAFCASS, Barnardo's and NCH. I hope that the group will produce recommendations by the end of the year. I know that she is very much aware, too, of the fact that we are considering in the round all the issues that she raised tonight.

The need for further legislation is always kept under review. At the moment, however, I am very keen to make sure—given the changes that we are making here and the changes that we have made in the past—that the legislation works adequately and for the benefit of children in vulnerable situations. I look forward to working closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South, who is chair of the all-party group on domestic violence, and with the organisations that are already working with us to look at how we can increase protection for children.

Having given those explanations, I hope that the House will agree to Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 49.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendment No. 45 agreed to.

Clause 112

SPECIAL GUARDIANS

Lords amendment: No. 46, in page 63, line 29, at end insert—"(b) a birth parent;"

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move amendment (a) to the Lords amendment, in line 2, leave out "birth".

Amendment No. 46 was a Liberal Democrat amendment accepted by the Government on Third Reading in another place on the understanding that we would need to table a technical correction in the House of Commons. The effect of amendment No. 46 is to insert "birth parents" into the list in proposed new section 14F(2) of people whose needs for special guardianship support a local authority may—or, if the Secretary of State requires, must—assess on request. We have said previously that we could use the power in proposed new subsection (2)(c) to prescribe other people who may be assessed, which would be a means of including birth parents. We are, however, sympathetic to the suggestion that we should provide a signal in the legislation that we anticipate that birth parents are likely to be key recipients of special guardianship support services, which is why we agreed the amendment. However, the term "birth parent" is not one used in the Children Act , so we need to correct it to "parent". The amendment will thereby achieve the intention behind amendment No. 46, as the term "parent" will be given its natural meaning—the child's birth parents, or, in the case of adopted children under special guardianship orders, their adoptive parents. I hope that Members will recognise that that addresses the concerns underlying the original amendment and the need to make a technical correction to it.

In case this is the last time that I speak in the House on the Adoption and Children Bill—*[Interruption.]* As the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) says from a sedentary position, I jolly well hope that it is. I want to put on record the honour that I feel at having served on this Bill. Members on both sides of the House have agreed that the Bill will make a difference to vulnerable children and to the adoption process.

I particularly want to place on the record my thanks to the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), and the other members of the Committee, including the Whips and my

[Jacqui Smith]

Parliamentary Private Secretary, who have stayed with the Bill throughout its lengthy proceedings. To continue the love-in that started earlier, I record my appreciation of the good-natured way in which Opposition Members have approached the Bill, the commitment of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) to scrutinising it and the hard work of the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley), which I understand has resulted in her promotion. I also pay tribute to the commitment of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris).

It has been an honour to work on this Bill, and I hope that this will be the last thing that I have to say about it, but the most important point is that it will, I hope, in years to come, make a difference to the opportunities for children in this country.

Amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 47 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 48 and 49 disagreed to.

Amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 49 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 50 to 57 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 58 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 59 and 60 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 61 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 62 to 65 and 67 to 92 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 93 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 94 and 95 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 96 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 97 to 107 agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Supreme Court Of England And Wales

That the draft Maximum Number of Judges Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 15th October, be approved.

Data Protection

That the draft Data Protection (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data) (Elected Representatives) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 24th July, be approved.

Constitutional Law

That the draft Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 16th October, be approved.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Food Supplements

9.59 pm

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I rise to present a petition of some 450 people in Blackpool who are supporters of Consumers for Health Choice. I am delighted to do so and give the petition my strong support. It reads as follows:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters,

Declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of U.K. consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the Petitioners remain, Etc.

To lie upon the Table.

10 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I rise on behalf of 112 petitioners from my constituency who are supporters of Consumers for Health Choice. The petition has my full support. It reads as follows:

To the House of Commons

The petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters,

Declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of U.K. consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the Petitioners remain, Etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): With all the votes, it feels as though we have run a marathon in the past few minutes.

I am told by one hon. Friend that I have won the award for the most obscurely named Adjournment debate this year, and the title does indeed conjure up images of Dickens' Circumlocution Office. The moments of birth, death and marriage are some of the most tender in people's lives, but they are also points at which the state touches people's lives, day in, day out. It is often forgotten that it is not only the civil registration of marriages that is governed by state legislation: all marriages in church and religious ceremonies are covered as well. It is worth bearing it in mind that, in 1999, 263,515 marriages took place in England and Wales, so the number of people touched every single year by parliamentary legislation is significant.

In a former world, there was a different dispensation: the Church provided for all hatching, matching and dispatching. The Church—as opposed to the state—started to intervene in marriage in 313, so it has been directly involved in such matters for a long time. In the former world, a fact of significant interest to the state when legislating on marriage in particular was that the vast majority of people remained resident in one place throughout their whole life, so the system that arose covering, for example, the publication of banns of marriage was eminently suitable for the villages of England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland in the 10th or 11th centuries, and remained suitable up until perhaps the mid-19th century. Since then, however, things have changed, and now many of our constituents may, throughout the course of their life, reside in 10, 15 or even 20 constituencies.

One of the most significant changes to have occurred in recent years is to marriage. The number of people who choose to get married not in church but in a civil service has grown dramatically.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): It might help to reinforce my hon. Friend's argument, with which I agree, for him to learn that only last week I was invited by my researcher, Mr. Donald Campbell, to act as his best man at his wedding next June on top of a mountain near Aviemore.

Mr. Bryant: I am not sure which mountain near Aviemore that might be, but I am sure that there could be no better best man than my hon. Friend. He may be interested to know that that option would not be available to his researcher if he were living in England or Wales because the law prohibits people from marrying at the top of a mountain, in their back garden or anywhere else other than specially licensed premises. My hon. Friend has neatly made my point.

The number of church marriages is falling dramatically: 34 per cent. of all marriages in England and Wales in 1989 were performed in churches in either the Church of England or the Church in Wales, but by 1999 the figure had fallen to 25 per cent. So, across a 10-year period, there has been a significant fall.

Across the span, over the past 170 years since civil registration began in 1837, many understandings about birth, death and marriage have changed. People's understanding of suicide and how the law should deal with it has changed dramatically. Whereas 170 years ago—even 50 years ago—suicide was primarily considered a sin and therefore to be treated as illegal, meaning that people had to be buried separately from consecrated ground, nowadays most people would consider the mental health rather than the criminal issues involved.

The change in the law in 1994 that allowed marriages to take place not just in registry offices but on approved premises resulted in 1999 in the marriage of 37,709 people on approved premises around the land. The vast majority of them took place in hotels, which are doing a nice trade as a result, but we have not yet seen full liberalisation, which I hope we might see soon.

Other understandings have changed. Even 30 years ago, the understanding of stillbirth was very limited. It is only in the past few years that people have realised that giving the child who was born dead a name and providing an opportunity for proper bereavement are essential to the long-term mental health of the couple involved. There is still some way to go in the registration process, as I shall say in a moment. There has also been a large falling away in the number of baptisms conducted by all the Churches—for a series of reasons, which I shall not go into.

For all those reasons, I am delighted that the Government have published an excellent although perhaps slightly under-read White Paper, "Civil Registration: Vital Change". I presume that "vital" in that context is a pun. Intriguingly, the White Paper has been issued under the auspices of the Treasury. I am sure that the Minister will later tell us why it was not a Home Office document. I also presume that many of the issues that will be addressed in legislation to come will reform the Marriage Act 1949 and subsequent amendments to it, especially the Marriage Act 1994, but I should like to describe a few areas in which the Government should be encouraged in their move towards change. I shall go through them in life order, as it were, starting with birth.

I mentioned the marked falling away of the number of baptisms over the past 100 years. It is important none the less that there should be an opportunity in today's society to recognise the moment of birth. I am sure that many families would welcome a formal opportunity—a rite of passage, as it were—to invite friends and family to an officially recognised naming ceremony. I am glad to see that that is in the Government's White Paper and I urge them to take that idea forward. I know that many registrars are keen to establish that new service.

In the world of the internet, it would also be helpful if people were able to register a birth online. There are thousands of other things to be getting on with at the time of a birth without having to worry about finding a register office and going along to it.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Before my hon. Friend goes through the other six of the seven ages of man, I want to draw to his attention a reform that I would like to the registration of births, which is to do with people who have changed sex during their lifetime. I have a constituent who was born a boy but had an

[Miss Anne Begg]

operation and is now living as a woman. She would like to change her birth certificate to reflect her new sex. Does my hon. Friend agree that that reform is long overdue in this country?

Mr. Bryant: I thank my hon. Friend. I wholly agree with the point that she makes, which has been made to me by a couple of my own constituents. The Minister may want to return to the matter later.

Pursuing further the issue of weddings, I am aware that, in a sense, I am one of the least likely people in the Chamber to be talking about weddings, though I am reminded of some words of Noel Coward:

"I've sometimes thought of marrying—and then I've thought again."

The present law is still relatively restrictive, compared with many other countries, and compared with most people's expectations of the law. So, for instance, one is allowed to get married only between 8 am and 6 pm, and only in certain places. The law also allows only certain fairly perfunctory services. I know that many people do not want to go for a church service, but would like a service that is a full recognition and which has all the weight and dignity of a decent service; and they have sometimes felt that the services offered by registry offices do not quite meet that necessity.

I would welcome the Government's move towards the celebrant-based understanding of registration—that is, instead of registering the place where one gets married, one registers the person who is to do the marrying. In terms of guaranteeing the dignity of the service, the most important issue is whether the person standing in front of the couple on behalf of society and of the people can conduct the ceremony with due dignity. People should have the freedom to choose where they want to get married, whether on the stands of the Millennium stadium or the top of a mountain in the Rhondda. Wherever they want to get married, they should be able to make that choice, while at the same time ensuring the dignity of marriage. Without that moment of dignity, the whole institution of marriage is undermined, which I am sure no hon. Member wants to happen.

There are specific issues that the White Paper does not address substantially. The Government may intend to introduce another White Paper. I understand that the Church of England expects them to do so later this year. As there is not much more of the year left, I do not know when that would happen. There are still some anomalies in relation to religious weddings, which are provided for in legislation. For instance, there are no restrictions on the times when Jews and Quakers can get married, or on the places in which they are allowed to get married. The main way in which ordinary members of the public can get married anywhere they want, if they can persuade the Archbishop of Canterbury to allow them to do so, is by getting hold of an archbishop's special licence. That is used in certain circumstances, but not as widely as it might be.

There are other anomalies. The residency requirement that is laid on church weddings to enable people to apply for a common licence, if they are to get married in their local parish church or if they are on the electoral roll, is crying out for amendment. From my former days as a vicar, I know that many vicars who have pretty churches are happy to enable anyone to qualify to be on their electoral roll, regardless of their attendance at the church. I do not want to issue calumnies about the clergy, but we may need to help the clergy to be a little more honest in the matter.

I support the Church of England's recommendation—I wonder whether the Minister would like to comment on this—that instead of a residency requirement or the electoral roll requirement, it would be better to prove a demonstrable connection between the couple who are applying to get married in a particular church, and that church.

On the subject of deaths, I have already mentioned the issue relating to stillbirths. Many hon. Members will know of families who have been somewhat distressed by the process of registration, or in some cases the absence of a process of registration, of their stillbirth. Although the national health service and many other organisations have moved on in providing support for couples, it is important that we move towards providing a simpler system which looks more like the registration of a death than the registration of a birth and of a death.

It should also be possible for couples to register a still birth in the hospital where it happened—a system that is now operated by some hospital trusts around the country. If couples are to register a still birth through a registrar, they should do so by appointment rather than by having to turn up in a room where people might be celebrating the birth and registration of a newborn child or a marriage. It would be more sensitive to introduce separate waiting rooms and an appointments system. It would also be a good idea to waive the registration fee for those registering a still birth, and it is obviously important that those involved in registering still births are given some help, understanding and training in the issues that they might encounter.

One tiny issue of which the White Paper takes note is the problem of people who die at sea. I hope that the Government will address it, not least because a distant relative of mine died in that way. As I am sure the Minister is aware, those who die at sea but do not die on a ship cannot have their death registered in the same way as others. The problem applies in respect of remarkably few people every year, but is none the less very distressing for the families concerned.

The Government mentioned several times in the White Paper the move towards making available the archives of the registers on the web, which I welcome. As genealogy is one of the most popular pastimes in Britain today—one has only to visit a computer store to see how many different software applications are available to enable people to build their family tree—it would be good if we could provide those engaged in research and ordinary members of the public with the opportunity to access all that information on the web as soon as possible. I hope that the Treasury will not be niggardly or parsimonious—I am sure that it would never want to be—in allowing that to happen.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise these issues and I hope that this debate has not been as dry as parchment, as some hon. Members suggested to me earlier that it might be.

10.17 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) for bringing his attention and that of the House to these important matters.

As my hon. Friend said, civil registration is an important service that touches everyone at some time during his or her life. It ensures the civil status of every person, protecting individuals as well as society as a whole. However, as he pointed out, the current system dates back to the 19th century. The needs of society, families and individuals have changed dramatically since then, and it is important that civil registration adapt to reflect these changes and support today's society.

My hon. Friend thought that it was perhaps a little odd that a Treasury Minister should be present to deal with these matters. Perhaps I should explain why. As he is aware, the registrar-general is responsible for administering the law relating to the registration of births, deaths and marriages in England and Wales. The registrar-general's office forms part of the Office for National Statistics, and I am the sponsor Minister for national statistics. In that role, I am also responsible for civil registration.

The Government consultation paper "Supporting Families", which was published in 1998, recommended that there should be a review of the civil registration system in England and Wales. It also promoted the idea of a wider role for registration officers, to include the provision of services associated and linked with the registration of births, deaths and marriages. The registrar-general was asked by the Government to take forward that review, following which he published a consultation paper, "Registration: Modernising a Vital Service", in 1999. The review does not extend to fundamental marriage law, although Ministers agreed that the registrar-general could consult on widening the choice of places of marriage.

There were almost 1,000 responses to the consultation. Together with other evidence, they were used to formulate a new policy framework for civil registration. Subsequently, on 22 January this year, the Registrar-General published the White Paper "Civil Registration: Vital Change", which details the Government's proposals for improving civil registration in England and Wales.

The Government's proposals, as set out in the White Paper, will give more choice in using registration services—choice about where and how to register a birth or death and where one can get married, as well as the wider choices of new services such as baby naming and marriage reaffirmation. These proposals will improve the service that users receive. They will allow change and innovation to continue in future and they will make full use of modern technology, about which I shall say more. They will help also to maximise the benefits that this can bring to individuals and organisations while continuing with the necessary safeguards.

My hon. Friend suggested that we should make civil registration records available in electronic form over time on the internet. That is precisely what we propose to do. Over time, we hope that all existing records of births, marriages and deaths will be computerised. Looking forward, it is intended to develop a system based on web technology for the future collection of civil registration information. That system will incorporate technologies that are up to date, robust, flexible and efficient. It will also contain features to maintain security of the data, and to authenticate users where that is necessary.

The Government have chosen to distinguish between historical records—those relating to people born more than 100 years ago—and records relating to people born within the past 100 years. We propose to fund the computerisation of the latter group of records, although some of the information will be treated as confidential. These historical records are to be made fully open and available to the public. The Government recognise that family history is a popular hobby. We have said that we would support not-for-profit organisations investing in the introduction of electronic access to these records.

I move on to marriage law and the wider role that is envisaged for registration officers. As I have explained, fundamental marriage law is outside the scope of the civil registration review and is the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor. Respondents to the registrar-general's consultation paper supported the prospect of greater freedom to marry in places other than those currently approved for marriage. It is widely acknowledged that many of the current restrictions on the time or place of marriage, which have been in place since 1837, are no longer appropriate in today's society.

I wish to reassure the House that we intend that the solemnity and dignity of marriage should be upheld in the proposals that we put forward. The registrar-general will continue to issue guidance about how that solemnity and dignity should be retained during the marriage ceremony.

As for Church of England marriages, currently the rule is that in most cases a couple who want such a marriage must go to the parish church of the place where one or both of them live, or are on the church electoral roll. However, it is not always easy to determine whether a person is "resident" in a particular place at a particular time. I understand that one of the problems has been different views on precisely what residence means. For example, the general view is that a student who is living elsewhere during term time may still be "resident" at his or her parents' home. Another example is where a couple wish to marry in the parish where one of them grew up and where his or her parents still live, even though he or she has a home elsewhere throughout the year.

Some clergy apply stricter criteria than others in these cases when deciding whether the person concerned is also resident in the parish where the couple wish to marry, and instead of calling banns may, I understand, require the couple to obtain an Archbishop of Canterbury's special licence. I am advised that such a licence can permit a marriage at any time and in any place, and without the calling of banns or the completion of any other marriage preliminaries. The archbishop is responsible for laying down the criteria to be applied in deciding when to grant a licence, but the detailed procedure is determined by the faculty office. Licences are granted, for example, to permit marriages outside the parish in which the couple live, in a private chapel or, in an emergency, where one of the couple is ill.

[Ruth Kelly]

As the House is aware, it is not for the Government to speak for the Church of England or the Church in Wales. However, I am advised by the Lord Chancellor that the General Synod of the Church of England decided in July that the Church should also move to a more flexible set of principles on where marriages may take place.

The Church proposes to preserve the ancient right of a parishioner to marry in the church of the parish where he or she lives, but at the same time to create a range of well defined cases in which a couple can marry in some other place of worship where they have a "demonstrable connection".

While the details are still being worked on, a good many couples who in the past would have needed to obtain an archbishop's special licence to marry should no longer need one. The proposals tie in closely with those of the Government, and the Church will work with us to bring about the changes.

The Church does not intend to abolish the special licence procedure, which has not, it believes, outlived its usefulness. It will still be needed as a means of allowing special flexibility in exceptional cases; a similar provision exists for civil marriages in the form of the registrar-general's licence.

The special licence procedure will also be used to permit marriage in places other than places of worship. However, I am advised that the Church is clear that that should not mean a free-for-all, which would permit marriages in unsuitable venues. In our White Paper, the Government explained that the registration service is ideally placed to act as a focal point for information about services associated with births, deaths and marriages, such as social security benefits, marriage preparation and probate. The new support and advisory services will be complemented by the provision of celebratory services such as baby naming, the reaffirmation of marriage vows and civil funerals. Like my hon. Friend, I believe that there is a genuine opportunity for local authorities to develop those services innovatively to meet the needs of their communities, now and in future. A wider role for the registration service will improve on the current piecemeal approach by local authorities and will be underpinned by the proposed national standards.

Baby naming ceremonies give parents who prefer a secular ceremony the opportunity to celebrate the birth of their child publicly and show their commitment to its upbringing. The Government will expect local authorities to ensure that a baby naming service is available.

Some couples wish to celebrate key wedding anniversaries by reaffirming their marriage vows. The Government support the provision of secular marriage reaffirmation ceremonies and will expect local authorities to ensure their availability. That will provide couples with an alternative to equivalent religious ceremonies and will form a natural and appropriate extension to the role of the registration service.

The Government acknowledge that it may be appropriate for local authorities to offer other celebratory services. The law will be designed to respond to emerging public demand so that local authorities can innovate and extend their services to fulfil the changing needs of their communities.

My hon. Friend also mentioned still births, currently defined in legislation as children who are born after 24 weeks. There is already provision for their registration. Proposals in the White Paper will make that registration easier and give parents more options about the way in which to provide that information.

As my hon. Friend acknowledged, making the necessary changes to registration is long overdue. It will not be easy and it will not happen overnight. Changes to legislation will be made through order-making powers in the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. It contains wide powers, matched by tough safeguards, for reforming legislation on a regulatory regime such as that which relates to civil registration.

As I hope I have made clear, the proposals for reforming civil registration reflect the Government's wider agenda for modernising public services. We aim to improve and simplify services and to introduce greater flexibility and more choice. Modernising civil registration is an important part of the Government's aim of focusing public services directly on people's needs. Above all, it is important that the public receive a better service at such important moments of their lives.

I thank my hon. Friend for presenting the matter for consideration. I assure him that the Government are determined to introduce major reforms to the civil registration service in England and Wales.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that the views of registration officers should be taken into account and that security of the records is important?

Ruth Kelly: I agree. I appreciate my hon. Friend's interest in the welfare of registration officers. We have consulted them closely in developing the proposals, and we intend to take account of their views. We agree that there is a balance to maintain between security of, and open access to, the relevant data. We are committed to finding an appropriate balance.

As I said, we want to respond to emerging public demand and we hope that local authorities will be in a position to take advantage of the new proposals.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 November 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

DOUBLE TAXATION RELIEF

THE VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Addresses praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (United States of America) Order 2002 and the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Lithuania) Order 2002 be made in the form of the drafts laid before your House on 22 and 23 July respectively.

I will comply with your request.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL [*Lords*]

Ordered,

That so much of the Lords Message [31 October] as relates to the London Local Authorities Bill [*Lords*] be now considered.

Lords Message considered accordingly.

Resolved,

That the House concurs with the Lords in their resolution.

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND TRANSPORT FOR LONDON BILL [*Lords*]

Ordered,

That so much of the Lords Message [31 October] as relates to the London Local Authorities and Transport for London Bill [*Lords*] be now considered.

Lords Message considered accordingly.

Resolved,

That the House concurs with the Lords in their resolution.

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Iraq

1. **Pete Wishart** (North Tayside): If he will make a statement on developments at the United Nations with regard to weapons inspections in Iraq. [77161]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Iraq has been in clear defiance of a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions for many years. We are working with colleagues in the Security Council to secure a robust resolution so as to ensure that the weapons inspectors can find and destroy the weapons of mass destruction held unlawfully by Iraq.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that reply. Does he agree with me and many other hon. Members that a United Nations approach to this crisis is essential? Will he congratulate and praise the Government of France on continuing to promote a diplomatic and multilateral solution to this crisis?

Mr. Straw: I congratulate all Governments who promote a diplomatic solution to this problem, including the Governments of the United States, France, Russia, China and the United Kingdom.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that the weapons inspectors could have been back in Iraq some weeks ago if the Iraqi Government's offer to allow unfettered access had been taken up? Will he explain why Britain and the United States seem to be pursuing a resolution in the United Nations that will give President Bush the sole power of decision making and veto over the future of any weapons inspectorate or any bombing or invasion of Iraq?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend's interpretation of the draft resolution is not correct. I know that he feels the same detestation of Saddam Hussein as we all do, so it is all the more surprising that he has been taken in by what Saddam said. Everyone knows that Saddam is in complete defiance of a series of United Nations resolutions on weapons inspectors, and that there were fundamental flaws in the previous inspectorial regime, especially the fact that it allowed Saddam to put his weapons of mass destruction into so-called presidential sites, which incidentally, are larger than the whole borough of Islington, and thus avoid inspection.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I commend the Secretary of State for his robust opposition to Mr. Sharon's proposal that if military action is taken against Iraq it should be followed by military action against Iran. Will he assure the House that any resolution supported by the United Kingdom will not bestow on any member of the Security Council an automatic right

to take military action if that state alone considers Iraq to be in breach of its obligations? Will he also give the House an assurance that if military action is considered necessary as a last resort, it is for the Security Council as a whole to make that decision? Will he resist any attempt to put military action on a hair trigger to be pulled by any state that so chooses?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Member for his support for our position on Iran. I made it clear on the radio that, although we understand the acute sense of fear felt in Israel, we do not remotely support the suggestion of Prime Minister Sharon that the appropriate way to deal with problems in Iran is to launch an attack on that country. There is a significant difference between Iran and Iraq. Iraq is a totalitarian dictatorship, whereas Iran is an emerging democracy. I take the same view in respect of the holding of Iran's weapons of mass destruction as we have taken in respect of the more serious problem of North Korea. So far as is humanly possible, we should pursue a diplomatic route if that remains remotely feasible.

There is no suggestion from any member of the Security Council that the resolution should permit a hair trigger. Both the United Kingdom and the United States have said that we reserve the right to take military action against Saddam Hussein's defiance of international law, but within international law, if the United Nations fails to meet its clear responsibilities. Our preference, however—which I know is shared by the United States—is for a robust resolution or resolutions to be passed by the Security Council as soon as possible to provide for full inspection of Saddam's holdings of weapons of mass destruction, followed by the destruction of the weapons.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Given the time it is taking for the resolution to be discussed at the United Nations, it will clearly be complex if agreed on. Would it not be appropriate for the House to consider its terms in detail if and when it is passed? Will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking that we shall have such an opportunity?

Mr. Straw: Yes. I intend—with your permission, Mr. Speaker, and provided that Parliament is sitting—to make a statement as soon as possible, when and if a resolution is passed. As for any issue relating to the authorisation of military action, which is not on the agenda at present but is obviously a possibility, I, like my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, have made clear the Government's wish for a substantive resolution to that effect.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): For many of my constituents, one of the critical planks in the whole question is the link between the regime in Iraq and international terrorist organisations. Does the Foreign Secretary consider that that link exists now, and is there a real threat that it might exist in the future?

Mr. Straw: We work on the basis that the Hussein regime is so evil that it has, for certain, the capacity to develop links with all kinds of international terrorist organisations. Certainly, it actively supports terrorist organisations operating in Israel and the occupied territories. I have seen no direct evidence of the Iraqi regime's involvement in the al-Qaeda operation before 11 September, but were such evidence presented to me I would not be surprised.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): If it were suddenly announced that there would be no military action in any circumstances, would not the chance of the weapons inspectors going back into Iraq be as remote as the possibility of that criminal and murderous regime turning itself into a parliamentary democracy? It is a pity that the critics do not recognise that.

Mr. Straw: Exactly, and I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) that, to the extent that Saddam Hussein has made any change in what he is saying—by saying that he will allow inspectors in—the only reason he has done so is the existence of a credible threat of the use of force against him.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): The Prime Minister said yesterday that we were

"reaching the point of closure"

in regard to a United Nations Security Council decision. Does that actually mean agreement, or does it mean that the crunch moment for a decision is coming?

As the House may well be in recess when that point of closure is reached, and unable to question the Foreign Secretary, will he clarify one or two points now? If the French veto the United States-United Kingdom resolution and propose their own softer resolution in its place, will the United Kingdom veto, support or abstain on that resolution? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the disarming of Saddam Hussein and the elimination of his weapons of mass destruction cannot be held to ransom by the political and commercial interests of one or two permanent members of the Security Council? Did I understand the right hon. Gentleman to say earlier that if there was no United Nations resolution as a result of such a veto, the Government would in principle support the United States in taking any legal military action, even without United Nations backing?

Mr. Straw: We are working on the basis that an agreed resolution will be possible. I have been working very closely with the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and my other opposite numbers, particularly the P5's French, Russian and Chinese Foreign Ministers. We engage in daily, sometimes hourly, discussions about the text of the resolution, and I share the Prime Minister's view that we are approaching closure.

I do not want to speculate about what decisions we would take if agreement within the permanent five were not possible, except to say that we would vote for or against resolutions on their merits. However, we have always been clear about the need for robust resolutions, or a robust resolution, in respect of Saddam Hussein. The strongest possible chance of securing a peaceful outcome to this crisis of defiance by the Saddam Hussein regime is if we can be as tough as possible as early as possible. That is what we are working towards.

I accept what the right hon. Gentleman says on the political and commercial interests of members of the United Nations, whether they are on the Security Council or otherwise. I made the position clear on the possibility of taking military action if there is no Security Council resolution but we would always act within our obligations in international law.

Of course I understand the frustration, which I feel too, that the House may be prorogued when and if in the next few days a resolution is agreed but I promise the House that I will take steps as soon as I can to ensure that there is a full discussion in a statement on the resolution, if it is agreed.

Burma

2. **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): If he will make a statement on the political situation in Burma. [77162]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I spoke to Aung San Suu Kyi on Friday on the telephone. I told her that Britain is very concerned about the lack of political movement in Burma and the renewed political arrests. The Burmese regime must enter into substantive dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi without further delay if the credibility of the reform process is to be maintained. We will continue to put pressure on the Burmese regime until firm steps towards democracy are taken.

Mr. Luke: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I am sure that like all hon. Members on both sides of the House who have an interest in Burma he was heartened by the release of Suu Kyi earlier this year from house arrest but disappointed by the apparent reluctance of the military junta in Burma to reinstate democratic government there. Can he do all he can in the policies that he pursues to encourage those British interests still with an economic presence in Burma to follow a policy of disinvestment, which has had some success in the past—companies such as Premier Oil in the UK withdrew investment in September this year—and to encourage other countries that have economic interests in Burma to do the same?

Mr. O'Brien: There is virtually no inward investment in Burma from other countries at the moment. The EU reaffirmed its common position only last month in relation to Burma. Its provisions are worth setting out: an arms embargo, bans on the supply of equipment that would be used for internal repression, no defence links, no non-humanitarian aid, no high-level visits, a visa ban and an asset freeze on the members of the regime. In addition, the EU suspended Burma's trading privileges in 1997 due to concern about forced labour in Burma and the UK does not encourage any trade, investment or tourism in Burma.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Is the Minister aware of the plight of the Karen people in Burma, which some people have characterised as genocide? Will he undertake to try to draw the international community together to focus attention on what is happening to the Karen people and to put pressure on the Burmese Administration to try to protect that people?

Mr. O'Brien: In short, the answer is yes. The human rights situation in Burma is very poor, particularly in relation to the Karen people and other ethnic minority groups. We are seeking to put as much pressure as we reasonably can on the Burmese regime to try to get it to amend its ways, to ensure that we get some movement towards democracy and, I hope, some reduction in the amount of repression that the Karen and other groups face from the Government.

Poppy Farming (Afghanistan)

3. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): What recent discussions he has had with the Afghan authorities on action being taken to combat poppy farming there. [77163]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The Foreign Secretary met Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Foreign Minister of the transitional Administration of Afghanistan, on 24 October. They discussed progress on eliminating opium production in Afghanistan. I was in Afghanistan three weeks ago and discussed poppy farming issues with President Karzai and other Ministers.

Mr. Dalyell: Was a UN survey right in suggesting that, whereas opium production in 2001 was 185 tonnes, this year it will be a staggering 2,700 tonnes? Is it true that 90 per cent. of the heroin that comes to Britain originates from Afghanistan?

Mr. O'Brien: It is true that about 90 per cent. of the heroin that comes to the UK is from Afghanistan, and it is certainly true that the poppy crop is higher this year than last year, although probably not as high as the 1999 peak. The Afghan Government's best assessment is that intervention—the destruction of 17,300 hectares of the crop this year—reduced the quantity of drugs on the market by about a quarter. We should remember that last year, for one season, the Taliban reduced production to drive up the price, holding on to their stockpiles for sale later. However, their threat to hang anyone who grew poppies cut production.

The UK's long-term strategy focuses on four areas: we will provide alternative livelihoods for opium poppy farmers, improve Afghan drug law enforcement capacity, build up the capacity of Afghan drug control institutions, and reduce drug demand in Afghanistan. We are determined to work with the Afghan Government to reduce the extent of poppy growing in Afghanistan.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The United Nations drug control office says that poppy production has increased 18 times in the past year. During that time, Britain has spent £40 million on trying to eradicate poppy production in Afghanistan. Has not that drug

eradication programme proved a catastrophic failure, and will we not pay a price for that failure on the streets of Britain?

Mr. O'Brien: As I have already said—I suspect that the hon. Gentleman was not listening—the reduction by some 25 per cent. in the size of the poppy crop has been achieved by intervening in this year's production process. Some pressure has therefore been exerted, but it is undoubtedly true that the poppy crop is increasing. We are not pursuing the Taliban's policy of hanging anyone who grows poppies—a policy that they pursued for one year only to drive up the price. Instead, we must recognise that this will be a long-term process, and that the growth of poppies is likely to increase in the next year. What we need to do is to put in place a strategy that will deal with the problem over years to come, and which will apply the downward pressure that, in the long term, will save lives in this country, as well as in Afghanistan.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Does the Minister agree that alternatives to poppy growing must be put in place quickly? When representatives of the International Development Committee were in Afghanistan just two weeks ago, the Afghan Finance Minister told us that he felt let down by the international community. He stuck his neck out by saying to the farmers, "I have an alternative for you," but the international community has failed to come up with the money. Does the Minister also agree that, unless ISAF is extended and security and stability ensured, there can be no reconstruction of any kind in Afghanistan?

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend raises three difficult and complex issues, but I shall try to deal with each of them. I, too, had discussions with Ashraf Ghani, the Afghan Government's Finance Minister, when I was in Afghanistan a few weeks ago. His main concern was to ensure that the money came through to pay the farmers who had allowed their crops to be destroyed. I have had further negotiations with him, and we have reached an agreement with the Afghan Government, so that that money will be coming through. It is essential that we provide for poppy farmers alternatives such as those that my hon. Friend describes, so that they can produce a crop that gives them a livelihood, thereby preventing them from believing that they have to grow poppies to survive. We will therefore put resources into seeking to provide, as soon as we reasonably can, the alternative livelihoods that they require.

It is important that we look at ISAF and related issues. There are discussions under way on ISAF and its deployment, but the key point is that the extension of the authority of the Afghan Government throughout Afghanistan is best achieved by the Afghans and the Afghan army.

Middle East

4. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): If he will make a statement on the Alexandria declaration for peace in the Middle East. [77164]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Alexandria declaration, by which religious leaders of all faiths are pledged to work together for a just and lasting peace in the middle east, has our wholehearted support. We recognise its important role in promoting inter-faith dialogue, and we have helped to fund the work of the declaration. In that context, I would like to pay tribute to the work of the outgoing Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey of Clifton, for his tireless contribution to the valuable process initiated by the Alexandria declaration.

Andrew Selous: Given the vital importance for the whole middle east region of a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, does the Foreign Secretary agree that the Alexandria process is just about the only viable part of the middle east peace process still working? Can he tell the House what steps the Government have taken to encourage the European Union and the United States to support that process both politically and financially, given that the International Centre for Reconciliation at Coventry cathedral has largely funded the process?

Mr. Straw: We have been in discussion with both our European Union and United States colleagues, and I am happy to follow up those discussions with specific proposals. We have also helped to fund the process initiated by the declaration. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it is one of the few viable processes of reconciliation between the two sides—the so-called track 2 process—but alongside that, and notwithstanding the dire situation between Israel and the Palestinians in the occupied territories, is the work initiated by the so-called quartet of the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and the Russian Federation. At the moment, the quartet is working on a road map for progress towards peace talks and a final settlement. I hope that that work can now be pursued and that the road map will be published.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Will my right hon. Friend condemn yesterday's suicide bombing in Israel? Can he confirm that it was carried out by a Fatah activist and that therefore some suspicion must arise that it occurred under the control of Arafat? Will he take measures to ensure that EU or British aid is not used by terrorist organisations? What steps is he taking to further the peace process in Israel and the middle east?

Mr. Straw: I condemn all terrorist acts, including the outrageous suicide bombings, without qualification. I have no more details than my hon. Friend about the background of the terrorist. We take extremely active steps to ensure that money that is put into the occupied territories, directly or through UN or EU organisations, is used only for the peaceful purpose intended.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Like my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), I wish to express my support for the spirit of the Alexandria declaration. It is important to see different religious groupings coming together in a common cause, especially when that cause is peace. At the same time, I trust that the Foreign Secretary will share my disapproval of the sort of religious extremism that causes obstacles to peace, be it from those who are intent on pushing Israel's borders to the River Jordan or those in Arab countries who refuse to recognise Israel at

all. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that in the run-up to the Israeli elections next February it is vital that moves towards a lasting peace do not get lost in the inevitable political manoeuvrings that an election provokes? Does he also agree that the peace process unfortunately appears to have stalled since June and that it is important that the United States keeps up a sustained interest in promoting peace? Given that Mr. Sharon and Mr. Arafat seem disinclined to talk to one another, what lower-level dialogue is the Government assisting to give new momentum to the peace process?

Mr. Straw: I agree almost completely with what the hon. Gentleman has just said. He is right to say that we must not allow the prospect of elections in Israel further to delay the path to peace, because it is in the interests of every single peace-loving person in Israel and in the occupied territories that we get the peace process under way. I am in almost constant touch with Secretary of State Colin Powell and my EU colleagues about how we give further impetus to the peace process set out in the road map. In addition, the hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in his speech to the Labour party conference, spoke about the need for the final status negotiations to begin by the end of the year. Notwithstanding the elections in Israel, we are actively looking at the positive steps that we can take to assist in that process.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the withdrawal of Labour members of the Knesset from the arrangement that meant that they were in government with the Likud party is a helpful sign? They withdrew because the Likud party was trying to promote the establishment of even more illegal settlements, which is one of the main stumbling blocks to a resolution of the middle east conflict. What is my right hon. Friend doing to help the Israeli Labour party to return to the doctrine of "land for peace", under which they won an election under Prime Minister Rabin, and to achieve the objective of getting the Palestinians and the Israelis back around the negotiating table?

Mr. Straw: Obviously, decisions by the Israeli Labour party, a sister party to the British Labour party, about participating in the inevitable coalition Governments are a matter for that party. However, I have two comments to make. First, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my very good friend Shimon Peres, who has just resigned as the Foreign Minister of the state of Israel, and to salute the astonishing work in pursuit of a path of peace that he has done in very difficult circumstances.

Secondly, my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) mentioned the extension of the settlements in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem. They are illegal settlements, and it is wholly wrong that the Israeli Government should have continued to extend them. The settlements now account for more than 41 per cent. of the total land area in the West Bank, and the continuing process of establishing settlements is encircling east Jerusalem. That is unlawful and plainly bad for the Palestinians but, because it makes it more and more difficult for there to be a viable and secure state of Palestine, it also undermines the security of the state of Israel. The reason for that is that the people of Israel will have a real guarantee of being able to live in peace and security only when we have been able to establish a peaceful and viable state of Palestine alongside it.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, if we are moving towards a more warlike stance towards Iraq, it is even more important that we show that we are concerned about establishing peace between Israel and Palestine, that we do not accept the illegal settlements that Israel has placed there, and, on the other side, that we are also wholly opposed to the sort of terrorist acts that have taken place in the region? If we are to persecute the process that the Foreign Secretary has outlined, does he agree that we must be seen to care about the results of the battle between Israel and the Palestinians?

Mr. Straw: I think that the right hon. Gentleman meant to use the word "prosecute" rather than "persecute". There is a difference. Internal persecution is the process going on in the Conservative party, whereas prosecution is a recourse.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). We are trying to avoid military action against Iraq, but I accept that the fact that it is a possibility means that we should strive all the harder to secure justice for everyone involved in the middle east conflict—the Israelis, the Palestinians and those who belong to neighbouring states. That includes ensuring the enforcement of all the UN Security Council resolutions—242, 338, 1397 and 1402—which place obligations on the Israelis, the Palestinians and the Arab states.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): The chances of success for the peace process are further eroded by the continuance of the Israeli Government's policy not only in building settlements but in constructing their security/isolation wall. Will my right hon. Friend pass comment on the fact that Israel continues to construct this wall on Palestinian land, in doing so destroying Palestinian property and razing Palestinian farmland? Will he give a commitment that the United Kingdom Government will be protesting as strongly as our counterparts in France and Sweden? It is my understanding that the French and Swedish consuls in Jerusalem are occupying a peaceful protest at Jayyous to try and stop the construction of the security wall. Can my right hon. Friend say what he and the Government will be doing to ensure that our protest is just as strong?

Mr. Straw: I have already spoken about the Government's position in respect of the settlements. Although I fully understand the need for security by the state of Israel and the Israeli defence force, and the fact that in certain circumstances there is sometimes a need to put up security fences—Israel is not alone in this—it looks as though the route taken by the fence was decided partly on the basis of security and partly on what land was available. That is unacceptable. My information suggests that when joined with the planned fence around Jerusalem, another 7 per cent. of the west bank will be annexed by the fence and 70,000 Palestinians without

Israeli residents' permits will be trapped between the wall and greenline Israel and so will be under further pressure to leave their homes. That is unacceptable, and we shall be making representations to the Government of Israel about it.

Gibraltar

5. **Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): If he will make a statement on the Government's planned response to the Gibraltarian referendum on joint sovereignty with Spain. [77165]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): As I told the House on 12 July, there will be no change in the sovereignty of Gibraltar unless the people of Gibraltar agree to it. I also said that if we could reach agreement with Spain on a comprehensive settlement, the whole package would be put to the people of Gibraltar in a referendum and they would decide. At present there are no such proposals.

Mr. Rosindell: The Foreign Secretary will of course acknowledge that since the Government's election, referendums have been held in Northern Ireland, London, Scotland and Wales. Will the Government undertake to respect the wishes of the British people of Gibraltar, whatever their decision, and will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to end this shameful period of negotiation with the Madrid Government and respect the freely held and democratic wishes of British Gibraltarians?

Mr. Straw: I understand the strong feelings held in Gibraltar. I have made it clear from the start that any proposals that were discussed provisionally with the Government of Spain would be the subject of further discussion with the Government of Gibraltar and would then be put to the people of Gibraltar in a referendum. On the referendum that will take place on Thursday, there are no proposals before either the British or Spanish Governments, still less before the Government of Gibraltar. However, our commitment that the final say is for the people of Gibraltar is absolute.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Does my right hon. Friend recall that in the early 1980s the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which had a Tory majority, recommended exactly the policy that he is pursuing now, and that the previous Conservative Government pursued exactly the same policy? Whatever the pros and cons of the argument, the attitude of the Tories, particularly the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), smacks at the very least of expediency and perhaps even of hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman should withdraw that remark.

Mr. Foulkes: The hypocrisy?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Foulkes: I will stick with expediency then.

Mr. Speaker: But the Minister will talk only about Gibraltar, not the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend is of course right, up to the point when he said something that had to be withdrawn. The Brussels process, which he had in mind when he made his remarks, was initiated by the Government of the then Mrs. Thatcher—*[Interruption.]* It explicitly included the issue of sovereignty. However, my right hon. Friend is too generous to previous Conservative Governments. Documents just released from the Public Record Office show that in 1971, under the Government of Edward Heath, as he then was, supported by all Conservative Members—*[Interruption.]* They fall for that every time, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Heath's Conservative Government were planning to give Gibraltar away with no referendum whatever. That is not our policy.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Does the Foreign Secretary realise that what really upsets people in Gibraltar is seeing him treat this serious issue with such levity—as he has today? Will he disabuse himself of the idea that the Gibraltar issue is about Anglo-Spanish relations? It is not. It is about the constitutional and democratic rights of the people of Gibraltar.

If, as seems certain, the people of Gibraltar vote overwhelmingly on Thursday against shared sovereignty, will the Foreign Secretary finally understand that the grubby, heavy-handed and arrogant attitude that he and his Ministers have shown to the people of Gibraltar has completely backfired and that he has achieved the impossible: a resentful but determined Gibraltar, a furious and disappointed Spain and a humiliated British Government? After Thursday, will he take the opportunity to bury the agreement as if it had never existed and to explore areas where agreement is possible, rather than talking about sovereignty where it is not?

Mr. Straw: I understand the need of the deputy leader of the Conservative party to let off steam, but even by the right hon. Gentleman's standards that was slightly over the top.

Sudan

6. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will make a statement on the recent discussions he has had with the Sudanese authorities about the war in that country. [77166]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs: (Mr. Bill Rammell) We continually carry out intensive consultations at ministerial and official level with the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in support of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development peace process. My right hon. Friend the

Foreign Secretary most recently met the Sudanese Foreign Minister at the United Nations General Assembly in September.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: We are grateful to the Minister for that response. Will he comment on Operation Lifeline Sudan? How effective is that aid package? Have the Sudanese Government obstructed the programme? Will the hon. Gentleman also comment on reports that many of Sudan's oil reserves are being used to buy arms? Is that not contradictory?

Mr. Rammell: The Lifeline Sudan programme is extremely important. We investigate every allegation about the purchasing of arms. At present, we have a real opportunity to push forward the IGAD process and we welcome the fact that on 14 October talks were resumed and that there has been a cessation of hostilities and unrestricted humanitarian access. That must be the starting point for a durable settlement in that dispute.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I welcome my hon. Friend to the Dispatch Box and to his well-deserved promotion. I congratulate him, his hon. Friends and Alan Goulty, the Government's peace envoy to Sudan, on the work that has been done to assist the Machakos peace process. I congratulate them on the military standstill. Will my hon. Friend assure me that every effort will be made to ensure that Operation Lifeline Sudan can capitalise on the arrangements to get full access for the first time ever to the whole of Sudan and that the work of that vital programme is monitored so that access can be maintained?

Mr. Rammell: I thank my hon. Friend for his words of congratulation, which are well received.

Operation Lifeline Sudan is crucial. Africa's longest running conflict is in Sudan and it has resulted in 1.5 million deaths, which underlines the need to get effective humanitarian assistance to the people who most need it as quickly as possible.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The Liberal Democrats also welcome the Minister to his new post. He will know of the Sudan Peace Act 2001 passed by the United States Congress. Does he support the United States of America in its threat to both sides in the civil war should they break the peace?

Mr. Rammell: I thank the hon. Lady for her words of congratulation. The United States—I believe—has been a constructive force for change and reconciliation in Sudan and has been working alongside us and all other partners to bring the two sides together. We certainly welcome its constructive engagement.

Elections (Sub-Continent)

8. **Ms Dari Taylor** (Stockton, South): What assessment he has made of the recent elections in Jammu and Kashmir. [77168]

10. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): What assessment he has made of the recent elections in Jammu and Kashmir. [77170]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The elections in Jammu and Kashmir were marred by high levels of violence and intimidation, which we unreservedly condemn. Despite that, the Indian election commission has made strenuous efforts to deliver free and fair elections. Many Kashmiris chose to participate. We hope that the election will be a step in a broader process that will bring peace to the region.

Ms Dari Taylor: I am reassured by what my hon. Friend has said, but does he accept that the situation in Kashmir remains dangerous and very concerning? Eight hundred people have died since the election was called and cross-border violence persists. I would appreciate hearing my hon. Friend's views on how a dialogue between Pakistan and India can take place and what qualities that dialogue may have. What does he believe is central to achieving a solution?

Mr. O'Brien: The tension between Pakistan and India has reduced in recent weeks. I was in Delhi two weeks ago on the day that India announced its intention to redeploy forces from the Pakistan border. That is certainly to be welcomed. Pakistan responded promptly the next day by announcing a return to barracks of some of its forces. There has been a broad welcome for that de-escalation by both sides. Both President Musharraf and Prime Minister Vajpayee have shown that they do not want war and that they want a peaceful way forward. We now need to ensure that there is an end to terrorism and a beginning of a process of greater contact between the two countries. In due course, I hope that it will be possible to hold discussions that will lead to a peaceful settlement of the disputes, including those in relation to Kashmir.

Mr. Love: I hear what the Minister has said, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) pointed out, 800 people have died, many because of cross-border terrorism. Pakistan appears either unwilling or unable to deal with that robustly. What action is the Minister taking to ensure that Pakistan lives up to the promises and pledges that it has made on this issue?

Mr. O'Brien: I share the concern about cross-border infiltration. We have raised the matter regularly with the Pakistani Government, including during the visit of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to Islamabad on 19 and 20 July, and when he met the Pakistani Foreign Minister on 16 September in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly. The Pakistani Government have assured us that President Musharraf's pledge that there will be no further movement across the line of control still stands, and that the Pakistani army is doing all it can to stop infiltration. We are ensuring that the Pakistani Government are aware of our continued concern and we are working with them in order to try to ensure that those promises are indeed kept.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Does my hon. Friend agree that there would have been more confidence in the election process if international observer teams had had full and unfettered access throughout?

Mr. O'Brien: There was some examination of the process involved in the election in Jammu and Kashmir. We certainly felt that the personal intervention of Prime Minister Vajpayee, which ensured that the Indian election commission tried to run free and fair elections, produced a level of fairness despite the fact that large numbers of people were killed. There was also, to some extent, a view in certain parts of Jammu and Kashmir that people did not want to participate. None the less, we hope that the election and other steps taken in the south Asian region can be part of a process that will begin to heal some of the pain and the disputes that have bedevilled the region for so long.

Convention on the Future of Europe

9. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): If he will make a statement on recent developments in the Convention on the Future of Europe. [77169]

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): The convention is making progress. The outline constitutional treaty unveiled last week provides a useful framework for the next stage in the discussions.

Mr. Bryant: I am delighted to welcome my hon. Friend to the Dispatch Box in his new post, not least because of his sane, sensible and sound views on Europe—although knowing his reputation for speaking so many foreign languages, I am not sure whether I should say wilkommen, bienvenue, or welcome.

Does the Minister believe that it is time that we finally had a legible and concise constitution for the European Union, which clearly delineates the role of member states, the European Council and the European Commission?

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend is quite right. What we need is

"to make clear to the citizens of Europe what the EU stands for, what it seeks to do for its citizens, and what it does not seek to do".

Those excellent and wise words come from leaders of the United Kingdom Conservative party, including the Lords Howe, Heseltine and Hurd, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), and the right hon. Members for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) and for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). That just shows that if the Conservative party unites on sensible policies in Europe, it need not die.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I welcome the Minister to his new brief. Does he agree that until recently the Government strongly opposed both a written constitution for Europe and a single legal personality for the European Union, they strongly supported the intergovernmental pillared structure of the European Union, and they promised that the EU charter of fundamental rights would not be made legally binding on British courts? Why, at the halfway stage of the Convention on the Future of Europe, have the Government abandoned all four of those policy positions?

Mr. MacShane: If the right hon. Gentleman refers to the excellent article in *The Economist* by the Foreign Secretary the other week on the need for a European constitution, he will find that that is fairly long-standing thinking on the part of the Government. The right hon. Gentleman had to resign from the group of Conservative parties on Europe because he is so far out to the right that he speaks for no one—not even, I suspect, himself. The task of the Government and all the parliamentary representatives to the convention is to defend the interests of the British people. I am content that they will continue to do so, and I wish that he were back with his colleagues arguing for Britain.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Will the Government support proposals for the greater involvement of national Parliaments in the European decision-making process?

Mr. MacShane: Yes, of course. It was the Prime Minister who set out the need for national Parliaments to be involved in the European decision-making process, and I am very pleased that Mr. Giscard d'Estaing has included that proposal in the draft outline constitution that he published last week.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I, too, welcome the Minister to his new role. Does he acknowledge the disappointment of many in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that the UK Government have never argued in the convention for the right of devolved legislatures or Executives to have direct access to the European Court of Justice? Does he not find it slightly inconsistent that the UK Government are arguing for greater transparency and democracy at EU level, which I am sure everyone supports, yet intergovernmental relations within the UK between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations are confidential and secret?

Mr. MacShane: The EU is an association of sovereign states and it is right that one state speaks for the constituent elements within it. There is the same problem in Spain and France. I think that the hon. Gentleman should park his nationalism and start speaking for Europe.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I welcome my hon. Friend to his new position. Given the absence of European government, is it not right and proper that the European Commission should continue to initiate legislation, given that we have a democratically elected European Parliament and democratic Heads of Government in the Council of Ministers?

Mr. MacShane: I am a democratically elected Member of this Parliament, and I want to see it playing a role in Europe. The convention and the discussions will continue, but I hope that at the end of this process the Prime Minister's vision of national Parliaments playing a strong role will be contained in whatever is the final outcome.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I, too, congratulate the Minister on his promotion to the role that, given his

track record, we must regard as Minister for a fully integrated and politically united Europe. Can he clear up some confusion about the Government's position on the convention, the constitution and the charter of fundamental rights? Did not the Prime Minister state in the House last week that the charter

"should not extend the legal competence or jurisdiction of Europe in any way at all."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 2002; Vol. 391, c. 546.]

How does that statement square with the comments on the convention by the then Minister for Europe, the right hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain), the week before that the charter's incorporation into the treaties would be acceptable, and that he was willing to work towards such incorporation? May I help the present Minister for Europe to avoid such confusion? Can he state categorically today that any constitution incorporating and giving legal force to the charter would be totally unacceptable to his Government and that they would veto it—yes or no?

Mr. MacShane: It is always good to hear the word "united" from the Opposition Front Bench. I sincerely thank the right hon. Gentleman for his congratulations. The Prime Minister made the British Government's position clear last week. The discussions will continue. I am now the Minister for Europe and I will take a very great interest indeed in the matter.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is still some disquiet about the workings of the convention? In particular, the European Scrutiny Committee expressed its disappointment at the weakness of the report from the working group on the role of national Parliaments. In line with the comments from my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), does my hon. Friend agree that on questions of subsidiarity, when it looks as though Europe is going too far, we in Parliament, rather than just Ministers, should have the right not just to bark, but to bite?

Mr. MacShane: I have worked with my hon. Friend for many years, and believe me, he is a remarkable biter. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) sits for the House on the convention, as do some Members of the European Parliament and representatives from the other place. The general direction of incorporating a role for national Parliaments is the right way forward. My hon. Friend's point is well taken.

Gibraltar

11. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What discussions he has had with the Ministry of Defence regarding the defence implications for the naval dockyard in Gibraltar of a shared sovereignty deal between the British and Spanish Governments. [77172]

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reaffirmed to the House on 12 July, we have made it clear that our current arrangements for the British military facilities in Gibraltar should continue.

Tim Loughton: I extend my congratulations to the new Minister and hope that he will succeed in being a better friend to the people of Gibraltar than was his predecessor. Will he confirm the news that the Royal Navy has moved two anti-terrorist boats previously used in Northern Ireland to Gibraltar, underlining once again the fact that the people of Gibraltar are in the front line of defence of British interests and have an important role to play as the closest British territory to the Muslim world—a role that they continue to accept loyally and unquestioningly? Does it not make a mockery of that loyalty for the Foreign Secretary to be negotiating a grubby backroom deal with Spain that would inevitably compromise the position of the naval dockyard as a strategic defence facility for the defence of both British and Gibraltarian interests?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman asked a perfectly good question and made a perfectly good second point, then muddied it with some rant left over from the Front Bench. The answer, of course, is that it is not from the Dispatch Box that there should be an announcement of any operational activity in the area that he mentioned. I do not think that the reference to the Islamic world is particularly relevant or necessary, but given the role that the people of Gibraltar played in defending freedom and defeating fascism, I as Minister for Europe can give a guarantee that Gibraltar will be safe in my hands.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and thank him for what he has just said. Could he give the House an assurance that, in the event of hostilities, Spain would behave in every sense as a true NATO ally and not obstruct the use of the Gibraltar base in any way whatever?

Mr. MacShane: We are entering hypothetical waters, to put it mildly. Spain took a clear and democratic decision to join NATO some 15 years ago. Its officers, service men and king are, I believe, loyal members of the Euro-Atlantic alliance, and I have no doubt at all that Spain will stand by any NATO or alliance obligation that may be put upon her.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Greek army today, in evidence at the appeal of the British plane spotters, has said that one individual in particular took excessive notes and deserves a prison sentence. Have you, Mr. Speaker, been approached by the Foreign Secretary with an undertaking that, if there is a guilty verdict and any British citizens are sent to prison, he will make a statement?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no approach from the Foreign Secretary on the matter.

Sunday Working (Scotland)

3.31 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to extend to Scotland the provisions of Part IV of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

I do so in a spirit of disappointment, in sorrow and in anger. The relevant sections of the Employment Rights Act, together with the Sunday Trading Act 1994, were brought in by the Conservative Government with the support of Opposition parties, to try to create a balance of rights within our pluralistic society.

The intention was to ensure that shops had the flexibility to be able to trade on a Sunday, that consumers had the flexibility to be able to shop on a Sunday, but that shop workers with religious or other objections to working on a Sunday, or practical or personal reasons for not wishing to work on a Sunday, should not be forced to do so.

Accordingly, retail workers who had contracts that did not oblige them to work on Sundays were entitled to refuse to do so without fear of dismissal, redundancy or any other kind of detriment. Shop workers whose contracts did include the possibility of Sunday working could give a three-month opt-out, which meant that after that period they could refuse again to work on a Sunday and would not be subject to any detriment.

The 1996 Act, like Acts for the previous 60 years dealing with this matter, going back to the time of Stanley Baldwin, applied only to England and Wales. Separate legislation dealt with Northern Ireland, but Scotland was not included. As the Leader of the House has said, that did not make a great difference, because, at the time, companies decided as a matter of principle that they should apply precisely the same rules on a voluntary basis to their Scottish employees.

The retail company Argos was one of those that did this from the mid-1990s; and it gave its employees an opt-out clause in exactly the same terms as the legislation. Sadly, this year, in an appalling breach of trust with its staff, it decided to exploit the lack of legal protection in Scotland and it presented loyal staff who had been working Mondays to Fridays or Mondays to Saturdays with an ultimatum of compulsory Sunday working or the sack.

That is an appalling denial of religious freedom to those who object to working at all on Sundays or to those who might not object to working occasionally on a Sunday but do object to doing so at the diktat of the company, where the company chooses which Sundays they work, for how many hours and with what frequency. Irrespective of beliefs, this is a denial to couples, as Sunday is often the only day in the week that they can spend together. It can also strike families in particular, as Sunday is the day on which children are most frequently out of school. In so far as women bear the caring and family role to a disproportionate extent in our society, they are also particularly discriminated against. On sexual discrimination, the vast majority of those who have been adversely affected are women. Of course, the practice also discriminates against people simply because they live in Scotland.

I believe that, in all those respects, compulsory Sunday working is offensive to principles that would be shared across the political spectrum in this House. Early-day motion 1498, which has achieved the support of more than 200 hon. Members, is a clear indication of the strength of support that exists. Members of Parliament including Ministers, leading members of the Churches and other Church representatives, and various other people have written to Argos. It was obviously far more desirable that the matter be settled by agreement than by legislation. Sadly, however, Argos ruthlessly continued to pursue its policy and has either driven people into accepting compulsory Sunday working or driven them out of work all together.

I should like to comment on some of the responses given by Argos to our representations. The company claimed that it had fully consulted, when it had in fact breached its own union agreement by not having any prior discussion with the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. It claimed that 97 per cent. of its workers had voluntarily accepted the new Sunday working arrangements, but that figure is as credible as a general election result in Iraq. As for the word "voluntarily", it is used in a rather special sense, meaning, "Do this or you are sacked."

Mr. Terry Duddy, the chief executive of Argos, wrote to me piously:

"We pride ourselves on dealing with staff with fairness and respect, and believe our actions have shown this."

That contrasts with what Mr. Steve Farndale, the Scottish area manager, said in an intranet message sent to store managers asking them to discuss the compulsory Sunday working change:

"Bring your . . . problems in a big bag . . . and I'll bring a big bin."

We can also refer to internal company documents, which showed callous calculation; to the treatment of individual staff, which was ruthless; or to the case of a mother who said that she wanted to spend time with her daughter, but was told to find somebody else to watch over her. A daughter giving respite care to a critically ill parent was told, "You can do that any time."

Normal family affection was treated as a sin against corporate greed. The firm instructed that, where managers found that truly exceptional circumstances made it impossible for somebody to work on a Sunday, they should demand that that person come back for interrogation every month to find out whether the circumstances had changed. Reading about some of the individual cases, I thought that what was happening was Dickensian, but I decided that that was unfair, because even Scrooge at his worst gave Bob Cratchit time off and did not demand intrusive personal questioning or a monthly update on Tiny Tim's state of health.

Despite all appeals—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will see the chief executive of the company tomorrow at Dover house—the company has gone ahead with sacking and driving out loyal long-serving staff and has coerced others into Sunday working. I would have preferred it if the matter had been dealt with on a consensual basis. That is why I speak in sorrow and anger. The company has been intransigent and the legislation is needed.

Today, I hope that we can set down a marker for legislation in the next Session that would, I hope with the support of the whole House, extend to shopworkers in Scotland the protection that is currently enjoyed by those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Malcolm Savidge, Miss Anne Begg, Mr. Roy Beggs, Mr. John Bercow, Mr. Russell Brown, Malcolm Bruce, Mr. Frank Doran, Mr. Calum McDonald, Sandra Osborne, Mr. David Stewart, Mr. Michael Weir and Sir Nicholas Winterton.

SUNDAY WORKING (SCOTLAND)

Mr. Savidge accordingly presented a Bill to extend to Scotland the provisions of Part IV of the Employment Rights Act 1996: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Thursday 7 November, and to be printed [Bill 205].

Mr. Speaker: Before we begin proceedings on the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, I wish to make a short announcement about the later business on the House's agenda for today. Hon. Members who are concerned with the proceedings on the Enterprise Bill should be aware that a paper is now available in the Vote Office, setting out the Government's proposals for a response to the Lords message on the Bill. The paper contains the motion, which will be the basis of debate when we come to item 4 on the Order Paper.

NATIONALITY, IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 4)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order (28 June 2001),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill for the purposes of supplementing the Orders of 24th April, 9th May and 11th June 2002:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion six hours after their commencement or, if later, at ten o'clock.

2. Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the Table below and shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) in accordance with the second column of that Table.

Amendments	*Time for conclusion*
1 to 15 and 237	½ hour after commencement
17 to 44	2½ hours after commencement
104 to 109	3½ hours after commencement
84, 86 and 99	3¾ hours after commencement
127 to 191 and 215	5½ hours after commencement
16, 45 to 83, 85, 87 to 98, 100 to 103, 110 to 126, 192 to 214, 216 to 236 and 238 to 311	6 hours after commencement or, if later, ten o'clock

Subsequent stages

3. Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question put.

4. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

—[Mr. Caplin.]

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill

Lords amendments considered.

3.42 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that hon. Members want to get on with the substantive debate, since we have a guillotine, to which we agreed because we have limited time. We are not comfortable with it but we accept it in the circumstances. I want to register an anxiety on which you may be able to reflect.

I understand the pressures on the Home Secretary and I do not make a personal criticism of him, but is it desirable for Government amendments to Lords amendments to be tabled in the last few minutes of the previous day's proceedings? The few hours since the Vote Office opened this morning constituted our only opportunity to take advice on them. We all understand end-of-term pressures, but perhaps you could suggest that it would be at least helpful, if not the norm, to have earlier notice, especially of Government amendments to a Government Bill.

Mr. Speaker: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's views. It is up to Ministers to look into the matter but we can do nothing about it today.

I draw the attention of the House to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 24, 36, 37, 40, 48, 84 to 86, 99, 102, 179, 190, 214, 215 and 276, which are to be considered today. If the House agrees to these Lords amendments, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the journal.

Clause 4

DEPRIVATION OF CITIZENSHIP

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 3, line 20, leave out "2(2A)" and insert "2B".

3.43 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this, we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 13, 14 and Government amendment (a) thereto, 15 and 237.

Mr. Blunkett: This may be the only moment of anonymity—

Simon Hughes: Surely not.

Mr. Blunkett: I mean unanimity. I must get my vowels, if nothing else, the right way round. The amendment forms part of a broader thrust in the Bill to try to ensure that we build trust at home and are therefore in a better position to welcome those from around the world who are either fleeing death and torture, seeking economic refuge or have rights that they

[Mr. Blunkett]

want to exercise. We want to try to ensure that they receive a warm welcome in this country. The amendment seeks to achieve that.

We are talking here about righting an historical wrong, in terms of what happened back in the late 1960s and early 1980s in regard to British overseas citizens, protected persons and British subjects. Those three groups found themselves in an anomalous situation, and on 4 July I said that I wished to put right that anomaly for British overseas citizens. In October, I said that I wished to do the same for protected persons and British subjects. The amendment seeks to clarify the third of the requirements relating to the action or inaction of the individuals in respect of their citizenship elsewhere in the world. We are amending that third point to apply to those who have, in those circumstances, given up citizenship of another country since 4 July.

That date was chosen because that was when we made our first indication of the change, and because we do not want those whose cases date from before then to be discriminated against or disqualified simply by the accident of the circumstances in which they find themselves. This will avoid disqualifying people who, through no fault of their own, did not know, for example, that their inaction would disqualify them from citizenship in their country of origin. The measure will also protect those who believed that they could use the special voucher scheme, which is now defunct.

This small amendment to the Lords amendment will ensure that we do not put people in an anomalous position, and will allow us to welcome those who have found themselves excluded for many years. I hope that the House will put that right this afternoon.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): The Home Secretary is, uncharacteristically, being too pessimistic. There could be quite a lot of agreement in the House this afternoon, because I am glad to say that, after a certain amount of huffing and puffing in the media, the Government appear to have made splendid concessions on a range of issues that had concerned us. I suspect that there will be many instances of agreement, or, at any rate, of the Opposition coming to meet the Government half way. Indeed, with one exception, I do not expect us to be at loggerheads. In relation to these particular amendments, all that we have to say is that we have agreed with them and we continue to do so.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I think that I may have provoked the Home Secretary's remark about unanimity. It is rare for me to get up in debates on immigration and asylum to congratulate the Home Secretary, but I would like to take this opportunity to do so. I would also like to thank him for introducing to the Bill in the Lords—and further amending it to improve it—amendments that mean that the most racialist underpinning of Britain's immigration and nationality laws is about to be swept away. For me, this is important not only because I have been campaigning against racism in immigration and nationality law for almost the whole 35 years for which these measures have existed, but because I represent the town of Slough, and my two predecessors as Labour MPs for the town both opposed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968. Many people thereafter chose to agree with them, with the benefit of hindsight, but Joan Lestor and Fenner Brockway were two of the very few Labour Members of Parliament who opposed that legislation at the time.

With the House's permission, I would like to read out a few words that Joan spoke—at 7am, I might add, after an all-night debate; I am glad that those are a thing of the past, too. She said:

"The Home Secretary and the Under-Secretary are not racialists. We all say that we are not, yet we pass legislation which is what those who speak with racialist tongues want us to pass. Until we fight on the grounds of equality, we shall never further our race relations."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1968; Vol. 759, c. 1710.]

I believe that she was right, and we should bear those words in mind as we consider the Bill and all our legislation.

Since the 1968 Act, we have had seven Bills on immigration, asylum and nationality, and every time we debate them racial attacks in our constituencies increase, because by using the huge mechanism of legislation to focus on abuses and problems, we make people with racialist thoughts think they are justified. I urge the Home Secretary to consider that we should put our energy not into new legislation but into making sure that we can manage and arrange the delivery of existing legislation so that people can have confidence in the integrity of the system. It is time to stop writing laws that inevitably are devised for the tiny handful of people who are cheats and therefore cause injustice for the honest majority. We must ensure that we make our existing laws work. If we do that, as well as agreeing to this amendment, we will have done something worth while today.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I hope that the Home Secretary has not been carried away by the wave of unanimity, rather than anonymity, that he has inspired this afternoon. It is important to place on the record our appreciation of these minor amendments. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I have come late to the Bill, having had other responsibilities, but I have read very carefully the debates in another place and elsewhere. As well as the minor amendments that form the majority of this group we wholly welcome the more substantive changes in Lords amendment No. 14, Government amendment (a) and Lords amendment No. 15.

I pay tribute not only to the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), who has again demonstrated her excellent record on these matters, but to my noble Friend Lord Dholakia, who put forward a cogent argument on behalf of those who would have been disadvantaged by the Bill. The Home Secretary has listened, particularly to the arguments about those Kenyans who might have been disadvantaged by the abrupt and precipitate end to the voucher system, and he has done something about it, for which we thank him.

On Lords amendment No. 15, arguments were adduced in another place by my noble Friend Lord Avebury about a minor but significant area of discrimination in the Bill. If I may express disappointment without shattering the unanimity, I echo the remarks of Lord Avebury about a further small step that should have been taken: the removal of the qualification date of 7 February 1961 from the

amendment. That would have removed an inequality for a small and finite number of individuals and put paid to the last vestige of discrimination in the Bill.

The Home Secretary has not been able to go the extra mile. I would be churlish if I did not thank him for the amendments that he has already accepted, and I hope that he will reconsider that point so that we will not discriminate between, for example, siblings born either side of a watershed date. We should ensure that future legislation on these matters, like Lords amendment No. 15, contains neither racial nor sexual discrimination. We welcome the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 13 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 14 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 15 and 237 agreed to.

Clause 14

ESTABLISHMENT OF CENTRES

Lords amendment: No. 17, in page 9, line 8, at end insert—

"( ) An accommodation centre shall be established only when the Secretary of State is satisfied that the proposed location is suitable to the needs of the persons to be accommodated therein."

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 18, 19 and the Government motion to disagree thereto, 20 and amendment (a) and the Government motion to disagree thereto, 21 to 24, 25 and amendments (a) and (b) and Government motion to disagree thereto, 26 and Government motion to disagree thereto and Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu, 27, 28 and Government amendments (a) and (b) thereto, 29 to 37, 38 and Government motion to disagree thereto and Government amendments (a) to (e) to the words so restored, 39 and Government motion to disagree thereto and Government amendment (a) to the words so restored, 40, 41 and Government motion to disagree thereto, 42 and Government motion to disagree thereto, 43 and 44 and Government motion to disagree thereto.

Beverley Hughes: We are about to debate an issue that is of great concern to many Members across the House. I hope that hon. Members will find it helpful if I take a little time—not too much, as many Members will want to speak—to set out our position. We need to address a number of specific issues on accommodation centres.

The Lords amendment provides that an accommodation centre shall be established only when the Secretary of State is satisfied that the proposed location is suitable to the needs of the persons to be accommodated therein. Clearly, great attention has been focused on accommodation centres. I shall set out what we are hoping to achieve with the trial of accommodation centres.

First and foremost, we all share the view that our asylum system must be fast, effective, efficient and fair. We believe that that can be achieved only if asylum seekers know what is expected of them, so we must keep in close contact with them and they with us. Secondly, we need to do that in a way that reduces pressure in the system and on local services. That is another important principle underlying our decision to trial accommodation centres, and why we wanted to provide facilities on site as part of the new centres.

4 pm

The accommodation centre trial is necessary to enable us to test the extent to which such centres can contribute to a more efficient management of the asylum process, while taking pressure off hard-pressed local services, particularly in the south-east and our main dispersal areas. I hope that Members will agree that the need for the trial is both clear and increasingly urgent. It is an essential part of our policy on asylum.

In the first instance, so that the trial could be effective, we decided to develop large out-of-town facilities that could be self-contained, thus allowing on-site provision of services to be thoroughly tested. In choosing sites, we look principally to previously Government-owned land. We are committed to developing trial centres in such locations, and for that reason we are vigorously pursuing our proposals for centres with 750 places at Bicester and the former RAF Newton.

In another place, we were challenged about location and accused of pushing on regardless of the points put to us. Lady Anelay argued that the amendment to clause 14 was necessary because

"there is no incentive on the face of the Bill to provide the Government with the opportunity to trial different types of accommodation centre"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 315.]

We have listened carefully to what has been said in both Houses and by others, and we have accepted the need for the trial to include different models. Indeed, the Home Secretary and I made exactly that point—not recently in response to the House of Lords debate, but more than a month ago to the Select Committee on Home Affairs.

I can announce today, as testimony to that commitment, that at least one of the trial centres will be smaller, for single men only. That will allow us to test the alternative approach against the larger centres to which I have referred. It may be that such a centre, because of its smaller size, can be in or on the edge of an urban area. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will welcome that, as well as organisations such as the Refugee Council.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I welcome what my hon. Friend has said. Has she seen the model proposed by the Refugee Council for a core-and-cluster centre? What does she think of it? Might she proceed down those lines?

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend anticipates my next point. I have met representatives of the Refugee Council, who gave a presentation on their core-and-cluster model. I spoke to the general secretary again today.

I have given a commitment, in saying that we want to go on working with the Refugee Council on its alternative cluster-based proposal. I think that it has

[Beverley Hughes]

some interesting possibilities. There are issues on which we do not currently agree, but both sides are committed to trying to resolve them. I enter the negotiations in that genuine spirit.

I can also announce today that I have decided not to pursue our proposal for a centre at Throckmorton airfield as part of the trial. Although I consider the site itself to be suitable, we have not been able to settle satisfactorily the necessary land acquisition arrangements that would allow it to be developed within an acceptable time for the purposes of the trial. That issue needs to be evaluated urgently. I will make announcements on potential new sites in due course.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I hope that I will be able to speak later, but it would be wrong for me not to express my gratitude to the Minister at this point. A huge sense of relief will sweep through the community of Throckmorton, which has already borne a great deal for the rest of us. May I invite the Minister also to acknowledge what the Home Secretary was generous enough to acknowledge—that the campaign waged by the people of Throckmorton was strictly anti-racist, and not at all motivated by nimbyism?

Beverley Hughes: I risk introducing a note of discord but my conversations with the elected leaders and representatives of people at Throckmorton were cordial, courteous and in no way racist.

I hope that the three elements of my announcement today will convince hon. Members that there is scope for flexibility in the trial—the Home Secretary and I have been committed to that for some time—that I am serious about having flexibility in the models that we trial, and that there is scope within the arrangements that are in place at the moment to incorporate flexibility.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): I thank the Minister for showing flexibility in looking at the form of future accommodation centres, but now that she is prepared to look at smaller centres near urban areas, which have been urged upon her by everyone with an interest in the proper handling of asylum applications and by a large number of other interests across the political spectrum, will she set aside the proposal to proceed with the large accommodation centres in isolated rural areas, which so far as I am aware would still attract universal condemnation? Why spend all that money on the large rural camps when she is prepared to contemplate testing the kind of accommodation centre that everyone has been urging upon the Government for the past six months?

Beverley Hughes: I am sorry but I cannot go as far as the right hon. and learned Gentleman would like me to go in that regard. I have made it clear that we want the trial to include a mixture, a range of models. The advantage of having a site for one classification of person—for example, for single people—is that the range of facilities that we would need to provide on that site would arguably be less than if we had a large mixture of people, particularly if we included families. That is part of the reason why we can contemplate a smaller site. The range of services that will need to be provided on that site will not be as great as that for other types of asylum seekers. Because I want to retain a mixture and because we are in the process of a planning inquiry on those two othe[illegible], I cannot give him the assurance that he wants but I hope that other hon. Members will take comfort from the fact that we want it to be a genuine trial and are looking to have a mixture of models in our arrangements.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Can the hon. Lady indicate what the size of the smaller site for, for example, single males will be?

Beverley Hughes: I cannot give the exact size, but I would have thought that the site would accommodate about 400 people, as opposed to 750 people at the other sites. I would not want to be held exactly to that.

Simon Hughes: The Throckmorton announcement will be welcomed but I would like to push the Minister. Has she concluded that there should be a smaller centre or is she just thinking about it? Her colleagues in the Lords were thinking about it and we had hoped that by now the Government would have said that there would be one. Does she believe that all centres should be able to meet the test in amendment No. 17, and do the two original sites that have been publicly announced meet the appropriate location test in the judgment of the Secretary of State?

Beverley Hughes: I will deal with the latter point in talking about the amendment. On the first point, as I have announced, subject to the practicalities of real life—of finding a site and all that—we will have a smaller centre and that will be one of the models in the trial.

The amendment would open up scope for challenge to the location of an accommodation centre in all sorts of ways and from all sorts of sources, particularly by way of judicial review, so we cannot accept it. It would create the possibility of delay and uncertainty before and after planning consent has been secured, and, indeed, throughout the entire life of each centre. The Government have made it clear that we will abide by the planning process, and by the outcome of any public inquiry. That is both fair and democratic, but we do not believe that a further avenue should be created. Such an avenue might be exploited by those who seek to avoid the creation of an accommodation centre in their area, or the provision of support in such a centre.

When introducing Lords amendment No. 17 in the other place, the Opposition made it clear that their resistance to siting accommodation centres related to rural areas. They welcomed the concept of centres and our trialling of such an approach—perhaps not surprisingly, since their previous policy was to detain all asylum seekers in secure conditions. However, for the reasons that I have outlined, I hope that the House agrees that the amendment is unnecessary.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): I am delighted by the decision on Throckmorton, and my constituents—particularly those living in Pershore, which is two or three miles from the proposed site—will be especially delighted. However, is the Minister now saying that the needs of asylum seekers who will be

residents of such centres should not be taken into account? If those needs should be taken into account, surely the whole matter should be subject to judicial review. What is the point, therefore, in keeping the provision off the statute book?

Beverley Hughes: The amendment refers to suitability and, as the hon. Gentleman makes clear, tries to link it to need. In terms of what is provided within the centre, we are clearly very concerned about meeting asylum seekers' needs, and ensuring that, in doing so, we can progress claims in the best and fastest possible way. However, that point does not relate to the question of suitability of location, which is the aspect of the amendment that I do not want to accept.

I turn to length of stay and Lords amendments Nos. 19, 25 and 26. Under the terms of Lords amendment No. 19, a person could be supported in an accommodation centre for a maximum of four months only, unless there were "exceptional circumstances". I am sure that there are no differences among Members—certainly not among Government Members—on the primary objective of establishing a fair and fast asylum process. We have made it clear throughout the Bill's passage that we are committed to faster processing, which will form a key part of the evaluation of accommodation centres. We want asylum seekers to be supported in an accommodation centre throughout the process of initial decision and subsequent appeal, but at this stage we do not believe it sensible to include in the Bill a four-month time limit.

Since coming to power in 1997, we have made significant progress in processing: about 70 per cent. of initial decisions in new applications are now made within two months. However, we must remember that existing statutory limits for appeal rights—which take into account practice directions issued by the chief adjudicator, irrespective of Government—would make a total limit of four months, including the appeal process, impossible to achieve in a manner fair to the applicant. At the moment, a substantive appeal hearing before an adjudicator will not be given less than seven weeks from the date of receipt of an appeal in respect of standard track cases. If we accepted a four-month time limit at this stage, we would run the risk of allowing all those seeking leave to appeal to the tribunal to leave the accommodation centre. Most such cases would involve those whose claim had been refused and where the decision was upheld by an adjudicator. They are precisely the people with most to gain by leaving the centre, with its tighter contact management arrangements.

We are all committed to the same principle of speedy decision making and we all agree that it is in nobody's interest for asylum seekers to spend long periods waiting for their claims to be determined. However, I wish to make it clear that I do not accept the argument that the accommodation centres will be bad places in which to be supported: they will not.

4.15 pm

In the light of the amendment made in the other place, and discussion about the issue, we have, as hon. Members will know, brought forward a revision that gives a clear indication of our intentions and provides the assurances that are being sought. Our amendment will mean that a resident will remain in an accommodation centre for a maximum of six months, unless in the particular circumstances of the case the Home Secretary decides that it is appropriate that the person should remain for a short time longer. If the Home Secretary does decide that, it will be for a maximum of a further three months.

We have also provided for an order, which will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure, to be made allowing Parliament to shorten—only shorten—either or both of the six-month and additional three-month periods. That is a clear indication that we are not just saying that we will accept that those limits are as good as it gets. What that says is that we will continue to do all we can to drive down processing times in the way that we have done since 1997 to secure a speedy, fair and credible system that commands people's confidence.

The amendment made in the other place recognises that there will be exceptions, and our amendment follows that logic. There will be cases, for example, in which somebody is due to receive a determination shortly after the six-month time limit and it would make sense to require the person to remain for that short period beyond six months rather than to subject them—and the process—to upheaval. Of course, the intention will be to complete as many cases as possible, end to end, within the initial six months in the accommodation centre. However, some cases are particularly complex and documentation for them needs to be obtained from overseas or from other organisations. In other cases, the asylum seekers themselves may have delayed the process. In those instances, it is sensible to ensure that we have the capacity to require the applicant to remain for a short while longer in the accommodation centre.

Furthermore, our amendment ensures that somebody may remain in an accommodation centre beyond the six-month period if they want to. Whatever views some appear to have about accommodation centres, our aim is to make them supportive environments where people will feel secure and where their needs will be met. It would make no sense to require someone to leave when they wished to stay.

The remaining amendments with which we are disagreeing—Lords amendments Nos. 41, 42 and 44—are consequential.

Simon Hughes: The Minister's announcement about time limits will be widely welcomed. Her announcement that the Government are willing to contemplate bringing the time limits down is also welcome. I am grateful that the Liberal Democrats' suggestions that we cannot reach our intended destination immediately, and that exceptions to the best practice should be allowed—such as permitting extensions to stays of a few more months—have been accepted, after passing between the Chambers. Am I right in thinking that the final package will apply to all people in accommodation centres, because that is slightly different from the original Government acceptance, which applied to families only? If that is the case, we will be entirely satisfied with the Government's proposal and will not push our four-month proposal this afternoon.

Beverley Hughes: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. As he has already deduced

[Beverley Hughes]

from the amendments, I confirm that the new amendment composites various suggestions, in that it applies to any resident of the accommodation centre, not just families with children. In the spirit of the progress that we have already made in reducing the time taken to deal with claims, I hope that the House will accept the Government's amendments.

The amendments on length of stay in accommodation centres are also relevant to some of the concerns that hon. Members have about education provision on site. I recognise that this is a key issue for many hon. Members. I share the position on which they base their views and from which their concerns arise—that, although we need to establish a good asylum system, the main priority is the best interests of the child.

The amendments accepted in the Lords have deleted the provisions in the Bill ensuring on-site education. Amendment (a) tabled by the Liberal Democrats to Lords amendment No. 20 would allow the local education authority to choose whether the education should take place in the accommodation centre or local schools. I am grateful to Liberal Democrat Members for their kindness in showing the amendment to me and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary before the debate, but there is a problem with its drafting. As drafted, amendment (a) would make the LEA the arbiter of whether a child could be placed with his or her family in an accommodation centre. That is something that the Government cannot entertain.

I hope that the debate about education issues and the impact on children of being educated in an accommodation centre for a period of time can be based on the reality of what happens to some children now and on an understanding of some of the advantages that will arise from the proposed arrangements. I therefore ask that hon. Members do not think in simple ideological or dogmatic terms. I do not mean to be pejorative, as I know that hon. Members hold very strong views on these matters, but thinking about the best interests of the children involved means that we must think about the reality of the experience faced by many asylum-seeking children, both before their arrival in this country and, sadly, afterwards.

The reality is that not all is rosy for those children in terms of their integration in schools in the dispersal system. We intend to provide those who are given permission to stay here with education geared to their needs. Because that education will be provided in a centre, there is the potential that it will give the children a period of stability and be to their positive advantage. I hope that hon. Members will bear that in mind, for this debate at least.

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): Will my hon. Friend give the name of one organisation working with children or refugees that has supported the Government's proposals not to allow asylum-seeker children to go to mainstream schools?

Beverley Hughes: I shall shortly cite the findings of a report from one of the major children's organisations in respect of these matters, but my hon. Friend raises an important point. There is confusion when it comes to distinguishing those children who are refugees—who have been given permission to stay and whose families' claim to be fleeing persecution has been decided in the affirmative—from those children whose claims are still being assessed. Children in the latter category are seeking asylum but have not been granted it. Most of them will not be granted asylum and—as was made clear in the previous debate—they will return within six months to the country from which they have come. We are therefore talking about two categories of children. Focusing on the experience of the children in the two groups is essential if we are to evaluate the current system and the potential advantages of what is being proposed.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I have a certain amount of difficulty in understanding how the experience of a child could be improved by putting that child in an accommodation centre, however short the stay might be, rather than a mainstream school. However, I was most concerned when my hon. Friend said that the experience of asylum-seeking children has not been entirely rosy. Is she implying that the reception given to those children by the teachers and pupils in our schools is not rosy? If so, what work is she doing with the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that all teachers make it abundantly clear to all indigenous pupils that asylum-seeker children should be welcomed?

Beverley Hughes: No, I am not implying that at all. Schools and teachers make considerable efforts, often in very difficult circumstances. However, I will deal in a moment with the points that my hon. Friend wants me to address in terms of some of the problems in the current system.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I have an asylum unit in my constituency and I visited a number of the schools there both last week and yesterday. They are coping, although with difficulty, and the children are settling in. However, the teachers and head teachers told me that if the throughput of asylum seekers continues as the Government want, so that decisions are made rapidly, primary schools in particular will have difficulties if children enter and then leave after some months, to be replaced by others speaking different languages. It is asking a lot of those small junior schools to cope with such disruption.

Beverley Hughes: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution, which dealt with some of the implications for schools and children here. It therefore has a direct bearing on asylum-seeking children as well, and we should be concerned about some of these issues.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): My hon. Friend will be aware that education is a matter devolved to the Scottish Executive, while asylum-seeking is reserved. What consultations has she had with the Scottish Executive?

Beverley Hughes: I have had two meetings with the Deputy Minister for Social Justice in the Scottish

Executive—I made a visit to Scotland not long ago and she visited me in London. Discussions on those matters continue.

Glenda Jackson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Beverley Hughes: No, I should like to make some progress, if my hon. Friend will forgive me.

I would like hon. Members to understand what can happen to asylum-seeking children when they enter the dispersed system. They often undergo an induction process if they come through Dover. Assessing them takes several days—it can take up to a week. Arrangements for dispersal can take some time and they may be in emergency accommodation until that can be arranged. During that time, the children receive no education. There is then the difficulty, in many parts of the country, of finding a place for the child to go. Those three stages can mean that a considerable period elapses between a child entering the country and going to school. That is one impact.

Some children have difficulty in integrating in the first instance. Over the summer, I talked to several asylum-seeking families and went to the accommodation where they were staying. I heard several stories from parents and children about the difficulties that they were still experiencing three or four months on. A young Ethiopian boy is still taunted every day on his way to school. He has one friend in school, another asylum-seeking child. I do not say that that is the norm, but it is not uncommon. The pressures that the current system is creating in some of our most hard-pressed communities means that it is sometimes difficult for the resident population to be as accepting of asylum-seeking families, and for resident children to be as accepting of asylum-seeking children, as we would like them to be.

4.30 pm

I want to refer to a report published by Save the Children.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Will the Minister give way?

Beverley Hughes: I want to finish my point; it is an important one.

In September, Save the Children reported on some work that it had undertaken in Glasgow, with examples of the experiences of young asylum seekers in the city. The main findings of the report rightly referred to school being the "highlight" in the lives of many young asylum seekers. However, the report detailed the views of children who had been in Glasgow for many, many months and so were fully integrated.

The report dealt with other key issues. It included quotes from children about racial abuse, violence and bullying. The detail of the report showed, tellingly, that to help children to integrate, schools in Glasgow had to provide separate classes for them during the first few weeks of their attendance. Schools then had to work to manage the movement of each child into mainstream classes. That was because the experience of many of those children was traumatic. Their journey to England and their experience when they first arrived created uncertainty. Many children do not speak English sufficiently well to be able to go straight away into a class with other children and make the most of the education that is on offer.

Some people would have us believe that the experience of school is unproblematic and the best possible for children in terms of integration. However, for some children—perhaps for many—that experience is not all that it should be.

Mr. Willis: What the Minister described is the norm for many children who are already settled in the United Kingdom. That is what happens every day. It is up to the schools to overcome the problems. Can the hon. Lady give the House a shred of empirical evidence that demonstrates that segregation promotes integration?

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Gentleman's labelling of the experience in an accommodation centre as segregation is unnecessarily pejorative. It is not segregation; all the children will be educated together in the accommodation centre. For children who are then given permission to stay, that will provide a stable and rich educational environment that relates to their greatest needs, especially for English language acquisition, in a way that an inner-city primary school could not hope to achieve.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Beverley Hughes: I am going to make some progress.

Glenda Jackson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Beverley Hughes: With regret, no; I want to explain what accommodation centres can offer.

Accommodation centres can offer a safe protective environment when people first arrive in the UK. They can offer a sound and decent preparation for mainstream schooling, especially in English. They will offer a high standard of education that will be inspected by Ofsted and will offer the national curriculum.

I draw the attention of Members to the remarks of the bishop-elect of Birmingham, Bishop Sentamu, in a recent radio interview. He said:

> "What is important when you come to a country where you don't speak the language is to learn English, be able to learn properly and be taught, instead of some places"—

[Interruption.] The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) does not like what I am saying and wants to drown me out from a sedentary position, but he will not succeed.

Mr. Willis: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Beverley Hughes: I have been generous in taking interventions, so I will finish the quotation.

The bishop said:

> "What is important when you come to a country where you don't speak their language is to learn English, be able to learn properly and to be taught instead of some places where you may actually become a victim of other people because they don't understand you. I'd rather there was a caring place than having these refugees who can't speak English suddenly being pushed into the community."

[Beverley Hughes]

I am not asking hon. Members to assume that the advantages of accommodation centres necessarily meet the needs of every asylum-seeking family or individual. Clearly, most people will still be in the dispersal system. We are talking about a trial involving a maximum of 3,000 people. It seems to me important, however, that we recognise some of the issues with which people arrive in this country, and that there is potential for a different way of meeting and dealing with those needs for us to evaluate.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Is my hon. Friend aware that during the difficult times that Dover experienced when we were receiving more asylum seekers and asylum-seeking children than we could cope with, local head teachers gathered together and approached me to ask whether a central school could be provided so that interpreting, special needs services and all the other facilities did not have to be provided on three, four, five or six sites?

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend is very well aware as a result of the significant numbers of asylum-seeking families in his constituency of the pressures that schools and communities can experience. He is right to draw our attention to the experience of teachers and schools in his area because it is germane to the debate.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Will the Minister give way?

Beverley Hughes: I want to make more progress as I am very aware that other hon. Members want to speak. I will give way in a moment.

My hon. Friend has outlined some of the pressures and issues and, of course, the UK is not alone in facing them. In Denmark, children are educated in accommodation centres rather than in schools. In Spain, the Madrid regional government is introducing an initiative, which will begin early next year, under which liaison centres will be established for migrant children who arrive during an academic year and whose Spanish is not very good. That is not segregation or stigmatisation; it is not putting children's needs second. Crucially, it will not prevent the integration of those who are allowed to stay. Indeed, as I have argued, it will provide a very strong base for that integration to be planned and managed much more comprehensively and in a way that meets the needs of families.

Glenda Jackson: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Beverley Hughes: No, I will not give way on that point.

We are not being inflexible either. The Government amendment makes it clear that, where special circumstances call for provision that can only or best be arranged by the local education authority, the education provider can recommend that to the LEA. That has always been our intention, and we have now made that clear in the Bill.

I believe that the Liberal Democrats' amendment is designed to leave the choice of whether education is provided on site or in the accommodation centre to the LEA. However, as drafted, it would mean that the LEA would allow a family to stay in an accommodation centre only if it felt that it had the capacity to educate the family's children in a maintained school or an alternative educational establishment. Clearly, we cannot accept that amendment because if the LEA decided not to bid to provide the education at a centre and believed that it did not have the capacity to educate the child at a maintained school, we could still not be able to place the child in a centre. The family would need to be supported and we would simply have to support them in a dispersal area where the LEA would have to provide education even if it did not believe that it had the capacity to do so.

I am sure that that is not the intention behind the amendment, but its effect could contradict the very purpose of an accommodation centre. Furthermore, effectively, it would allow an LEA to decide that an asylum-seeking family with children of school age should not reside in that area because the LEA had deemed that it did not have the capacity to educate those children. I hope that hon. Members will understand that that cannot be accepted.

Simon Hughes: I said in my letter to the Home Secretary that if there were drafting issues, we would be happy to discuss them, because this is an important matter. The Minister will understand that the amendment is designed to reflect the concern of her colleagues in local government, which we share, that it should be for the LEA to decide whether—to pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser)—it has capacity in its existing schools, or whether some other provision is needed. What is important is that the LEA has that choice, and that if something else is needed it retains responsibility—even if the provision is on-site in the accommodation centre.

The Minister understands the point of our proposal. We are happy to discuss the drafting of the amendment, but I hope that she is sympathetic to the principle that the LEA should take the lead responsibility. My understanding of discussions taking place elsewhere is that that point is being discussed. The Government need to move their position to accept that the LEA is the right body to make the first choice.

Beverley Hughes: I do not think that that is possible within the arrangements that we will have to undertake to establish accommodation centres. Within that procurement process, it will not be logistically possible to ensure that an LEA has lead responsibility. However, there are several ways in which the role of the local authority can be assured.

The Bill provides the opportunity for a local authority, which can include the LEA, to bid to provide an accommodation centre in its entirety. Secondly, the local authority, either as the LEA or as part of an LEA consortium—perhaps through the Local Government Association—could bid for the education provided within a particular centre. Thirdly, it is open to the local authority to help to develop the detailed proposals for the education within a particular centre—that is

happening at the two sites currently under discussion. Fourthly, in any case LEAs have an advisory role in relation to all education provision.

Let me point out that, even in our maintained system, it is the schools that provide the education. The schools run themselves—the LEA is not the direct provider. The Liberal Democrats need to take that into account when thinking about what they are trying to achieve. I want LEAs to be involved—I would welcome their involvement—and I have outlined the several ways in which, to a greater or a lesser extent, including total provision, they can be involved. I hope that those possibilities satisfy the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Willis: The Minister misses an essential point that many Labour Back Benchers have made, which is that currently an LEA does not have the option of saying that, if it has the capacity, it will educate all the children in mainstream schools. That strikes me as a point that the Government could concede without losing face on any of the other issues, because that is already the duty of an LEA. It is precisely the same duty as an LEA would have if, for example, a group of Romanian itinerants entered its area. The LEA would have a duty to educate the children and it would have the choice of either educating them on the site, if that is what is wanted, or placing the children, or some of them, in local schools. That is a perfectly legitimate and reasonable halfway house, and better than saying that the only place in which the children we are talking about can be educated is in the camps.

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Gentleman uses the pejorative term "camps" to support his position. His proposals on LEAs having the right to say that they will provide for the children's education if they have the capacity in maintained schools go against the essential feature of accommodation centres, which is on-site provision. Therefore, what he wants cannot be achieved. However, we can achieve the involvement of LEAs in the ways that I outlined.

We are quite willing to see the local education authorities provide education in the accommodation centres—for instance, if they are part of a wider local authority bid. We will add a further safeguard, as I said, to ensure that together with the bidders for accommodation centres, we will endeavour to engage in each case with the local education authorities so that they are able to put themselves forward as a subcontractor, perhaps in a consortium with other LEAs, or as bodies with specialist experience, if they wish.

4.45 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): As I understand it, the central argument in the case for accommodation centres is to maintain close contact between those asylum seekers and the Home Office while a decision is being made. In what way does educating the children of asylum seekers at local schools undermine that central purpose of the accommodation centre?

Beverley Hughes: The logistics of trying to provide for education in schools for a significant number of families in a particular place, who would have to travel out to different schools, make for very complicated arrangements and cut across the fundamental objective that we are trying to achieve in the accommodation centres—close contact with people and the provision of services on-site, so that they do not impact on local schools in the way that we have seen in many areas.

Gregory Barker: The Minister alluded a little earlier to the visits that she had made in the past weeks and months and her conversations with asylum-seeking families. In her discussions with the asylum-seeking parents of school-age children, did the parents express views about whether or not, in their first few weeks or months of settling in this country, they would like their children to be educated in units dedicated to the particular needs of their children, or in mainstream schools?

Beverley Hughes: I did not specifically ask the parents that question, but I got a strong sense, as I tried to convey to the House, that for some of those families, their experience day after day of seeing their children unhappy in local schools was profoundly difficult for them.

I want hon. Members to understand that I share the spirit of what they are trying to achieve. I expect LEAs to be well placed to provide the service at the accommodation centre, and I very much hope that they will want to work with us and the contractors in that way. However, I do not want to rule out the possibility of other bidders putting forward their proposals.

On legal advice and amendment No. 28—

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Is the hon. Lady conscious that we have just over two hours for this debate? She has spoken for nearly an hour, which means that there is only an hour for the whole of the rest of the House to contribute. I hope that she is not seeking to filibuster out any opportunity for colleagues to contribute to such an important debate.

Beverley Hughes: It is a question of being damned if I do and damned if I don't. I have tried to be generous with hon. Members while I am speaking, to give them the opportunity to scrutinise what I am saying directly and to ask me questions. Indeed, I have had to decline many hon. Members whose questions I would have liked to accept. If hon. Members tot up the time that I have spoken and the time that I have taken interventions, I do not think that they will find that I can be accused of filibustering.

I will try to deal quickly with the next issue, as I hope that we have been able to meet the concerns about it. I refer to amendment No. 28 and access to legal advice. The amendment in another place provides for the Secretary of State to arrange for the provision of facilities in an accommodation centre for the use of a person in providing legal advice to a resident of the centre, and obliges the Secretary of State to provide a resident with access to legal advice from suitably qualified advisers.

During the Bill's passage, debates have focused sharply on access to early legal advice as an important part of a swift and fair initial decision-making system

[Beverley Hughes]

that would reduce the scope for delay, and we have taken that on board. To confirm and deliver that commitment we have brought forward an amendment that requires the Secretary of State to take reasonable steps to ensure that a resident has an opportunity to obtain legal advice before the initial substantive interview. That clearly addresses the points made by the noble Earl Russell in another place when the amendment was introduced and, as I said, focuses clearly on the initial stage.

Let me explain what we mean by reasonable steps. We all agree that we want to cut out opportunities for delay, so we need to ensure that an amendment does not inadvertently allow a person to disrupt the system by failing to turn up for an interview, which the amendment introduced in the other place would have done.

What we have introduced makes our obligations clear. The Secretary of State must take reasonable steps to ensure that a resident has an opportunity to obtain legal advice. We will, for example, make sure that people are informed in reasonable time of the date of their asylum interview and how they should, if they wish to do so, access legal advice. We are all agreed about the quality of the legal advice that must be guaranteed. All solicitors and advice agencies holding contracts with the Legal Services Commission are checked.

We do not believe that there is any advantage in references to "suitably qualified" or "competent" in the Bill. Again, we are concerned that such references could open up the possibility of unnecessary challenge and delay. I hope that the Government amendment deals with the concerns raised and that it will be accepted.

Accommodation centres have received tremendous attention and I acknowledge the strong principles that are the source of the concerns of many hon. Members. Our rationale for the centres is clear—fast processing, and good facilities, relieving the pressure on local services. We may not have been able to accommodate all hon. Members' concerns, but I hope that they will acknowledge that my responses today on a variety of matters show that we have listened to those concerns and, where we have felt able, tried to meet them. Different models of centre will feature in the trial, there will be a time limit in the Bill to provide the incentive that we want to speed up the process, good quality education will be delivered and there will be access to legal advice.

Mr. Letwin: I begin by accepting what the Minister said towards the end of her remarks. There is no doubt that the Government have listened to much of what was said in the other place, and we are grateful for that.

In essence, the debate on accommodation centres springs from two quite different visions. One is the Opposition's, which the Home Secretary may originally have entertained, and the other is that which the Government happened upon, presumably as they discussed the issues with their officials. Our vision was of small, one-stop-shop centres in urban areas, each devoted to handling the cases of asylum seekers from a particular area, country or region. At each would be present the relevant translators, lawyers and decision makers for those people, who would become expert in the affairs of the area or region rather than dealing with Somalia at 9.15 am and Bosnia at 10 am in a dizzying sequence as at present, as well as the medics to provide such evidence as was necessary and the adjudicators—effectively the judges holding the appeals. That would allow everything to be done on site and at a speed wholly different from that to which we have alas had to become accustomed.

Like me, the Minister has talked to asylum seekers in centres throughout the kingdom and will have come across cases in which individuals have two or three different Home Office records in slightly different names. In such cases, different decisions are sometimes made in relation to two or three different sets of records applying to the same person. We have also met people with lawyers based 200 miles away whom they do not meet until the appeal; people in respect of whom decisions are made on the basis of inadequate documentation; and people who find that the adjudicator places no faith in the decisions made by the decision maker. That can happen because the decision maker often does not know much about the subject of the decision—not because he or she is unworthy but because he or she will have been called upon to make decisions about six different countries in the space of a day.

Those are the real-life problems of our current asylum system. Our idea was to establish accommodation centres that dealt with them all at once. The Government may have begun with a similar idea, but they moved away to the idea of establishing huge accommodation centres with only very partial delivery of the various facilities that are necessary to achieve rapid processing. The intention of the Lords amendments was to move the Government from one vision to the other—from their vision to ours. That endeavour was shared in great part with Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, to whom I pay tribute. It was also shared with Cross Benchers and some Bishops and Law Lords, and on several occasions with notable and distinguished Labour peers who gave support by their absence or by their presence in voting with us.

The Government have come a good way, for which I am grateful. The Bill is not perfect on lawyers, but we accept that it is the best that we can persuade the Government to provide. In my view, the six-month/nine-month rule, if I can describe it in that fashion, provides for a time limit that is vastly too long, but we accept it as the best that the Government are willing to offer. I am grateful that the Minister gestured towards reducing it further.

It is hugely in the Government's interests to move in the directions in which we sought to make them move. We sought to give the Secretary of State—in this case, the Home Secretary—power against his own officialdom. By forcing matters legislatively, he has not wholly taken that on board, but he has conceded a six-month/nine-month time limit, after arguing for many months that no time limit could conceivably be administered. We accept that in the spirit of good grace with which it is offered.

There will be further discussion later about education. Listening to the to-ing and fro-ing in the Chamber, I remain as I have always been on the matter—in two minds. One thing about which I am absolutely clear is

that, if the accommodation centres were as quick in processing as they would be if our vision were implemented, and took only six weeks to fulfil their task, there would be no discussion. Nobody in the House would claim that it makes sense to argue strenuously about whether a child who has just arrived in the country and may go home six weeks later should have separate or a mainstream education. Either course of action could be adopted and a separate education might make perfectly good sense. We are all a bit queasy—indeed, some of us are more than a bit queasy—about the idea of children being educated separately for months or years. At some time scale or other, the idea becomes utterly intolerable. I suspect that, if the Government really move towards quick processing, that problem will disappear.

Our main concern, however, remains with Lords amendment No. 17 and the Government motion to disagree thereto. That is the one matter on which we remain wholly apart. Before I describe the Government's position and point out what I think is a serious defect in ministerial logic, I should like to pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), who are in their places, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), who has rightly shot off to appear on the BBC to announce his victory for his constituents in Throckmorton, and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who has played a notable part in our proceedings. They have acted not only in the interests of their constituents but with considerable force and dignity.

I also pay tribute to many people who have nothing to do with the Conservative party who have helped to argue the case against large rural centres. For example, a letter was sent on 3 May from the immigration advisory service, Amnesty International, the Immigration Law Practitioners Association, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Law Society, the Commission for Racial Equality, Shelter, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture and the Electronic Immigration Network. They are not normally the most strenuous advocates of the Conservative cause. All wrote to the Home Secretary and made it clear that they were worried about whether large accommodation centres in rural areas would work.

The organisations said that they believed that such centres could cause serious problems both for those accommodated in them and for local residents. We believe that neither fast processing nor harmony—or indeed any desirable result—is likely in vast rural centres. We may be wrong. We are more than fallible: we are not only human beings but politicians. We may well have made an error. Have the Lords sought through amendment No. 17 to force on the Government the truth of our view? By no means.

The Minister rightly read out the amendment. Let me remind hon. Members of its terms. Their lordships asked that

"An accommodation centre shall be established only when the Secretary of State is satisfied that the proposed location is suitable to the needs of the persons to be accommodated therein."

The Minister presented some strong and persuasive arguments. However, when she considered the amendment, she was neither strong nor persuasive. How can the Home Secretary reject the idea that, before establishing an accommodation centre, he should be satisfied that it is

"suitable to the needs of the persons to be accommodated therein"?

Do the Home Secretary and the Minister seriously maintain that they propose to establish accommodation centres, which, in their considered opinion, are not suitable? Surely that is not the Government's policy.

The Minister cited judicial review as the main reason for her objection. Would judicial review judge whether the Home Secretary had found a suitable place? No; that is not its role. Judicial review would establish whether the location was sufficiently close to suitability to lead the Home Secretary and the Minister, were they reasonable people, to judge it suitable. The Minister argued—I presume seriously and not as a joke—that she resisted the Lords amendment on the ground that she believes that she will be open to judicial review because she intends, on the Home Secretary's behalf, to establish not only unsuitable centres but centres that could not be deemed suitable in the opinion of a reasonable person. That is not a serious argument.

I take it that we are dealing with Home Office lawyers' earnest desire to protect Ministers—their perfectly proper job—by ensuring that there is no basis on which ministerial decisions can be challenged by judicial review. That is another example of the Government's trying to limit the scope of judicial review. Their objection is not well founded in logic and cannot be founded on rational policy. It cannot be Government policy to establish centres that no reasonable person could regard as suitable. That approach is founded on a profound aversion to the intervention of the judiciary in the affairs of the Executive, and is not a tolerable policy for the Government to adopt. I shall, therefore, be asking my hon. Friends to vote in favour of the Lords amendments by doing what is open to us in the House, namely disagreeing with the Government' s motion to disagree.

Since the Government have made so much progress towards consensus by means of so many helpful concessions—not just in this section but throughout the Bill; we welcome, for example, the huge change in what was previously a ghastly Guy Fawkes clause at the end of the Bill—I profoundly hope that we shall not see this legislation getting into trouble in the Lords purely on the basis of an indefensible proposition advanced for no better reason than to limit the scope for judicial action.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I want to concentrate on Lords amendment No. 20, because it is identical to one that I tabled on Report that was never debated or voted on because of timetabling problems.

Before that, however, I want to make one or two more general comments about accommodation centres. We are being asked to set up mainly large accommodation centres, with perhaps one smaller one in an urban area. The immigration and nationality directorate of the Home Office will set the centres up, employ teachers, and arrange for legal advice, health care and leisure facilities in them.

Suppose an organisation outside government—a local authority, a school or a hospital—routinely failed to answer letters for months or years, even letters from

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MPs; routinely lost clients' vital papers; experienced major delays in decision making; and, even when decisions were made, in many cases failed to send out information about the decisions or to enforce them, particularly the negative ones. If such an organisation came to us and said, "Please can we have millions to spend on an experiment?", would we say, "Actually, we remember the last experiment you sold to us. It cost millions as well, and was to do with vouchers of some sort. Of course, you now have a new chief executive who has scrapped the vouchers, so maybe we will think about it."? We would not dream of going down that road. We would say to that organisation, "Sort yourselves out."

If we put a fraction of the effort that is going into the plans for accommodation centres into making the system work for the majority of the people who are going to continue in the National Asylum Support Service dispersal system for some time, we would achieve far more than we will ever do by going down that road.

I think we will be back in three or four years' time contemplating another expensive mess. The Minister spoke of the difficulties of the present system, particularly in relation to education and housing, but we set that system up and it will continue for some time. We have to get it sorted out and make it work. We are in danger of being distracted into putting a huge effort into something that is of far less importance than getting decisions made properly and getting them enforced when they need to be.

On Lords amendment No. 20, the letter we have all had from the Home Office on this matter says:

"This is not a policy to discriminate or segregate."

I am sorry but I disagree; it is precisely that. We are dealing with a minority of asylum seekers because only 14 or 15 per cent. have children. However, we are being asked to agree that those families cause massive problems in communities throughout the country. The term "swamping" was used about schools.

Like many colleagues, I know from my constituency experience that it is difficult for schools to cope with children who speak a variety of languages, who may not be adequately housed and who may move quickly from one place to another. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) said in an intervention, not a single organisation that we might expect to complain has done so. Teaching unions, individual teachers and parents are not saying that there is a problem and that asylum seeker children should be removed from schools. None of the children's organisations supports the proposals, and that ought to give us pause for serious thought.

Mr. Willis: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The Minister said that children would gain a better grasp of the English language by being segregated. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that every method of modern language teaching indicates that target immersion in the language—immersing young people in English not only in the classroom but in the playground—is the best way to learn? This policy will drive children to speak their own language rather than to grasp English, which the Home Secretary clearly wants them to do since he said that he wants them to speak English at home.

Mr. Gerrard: I will come to that point later in my speech. Anybody who has tried to learn another language knows that one can sit in a classroom all day but one only starts to develop expertise by talking to people for whom that language is their native tongue. Last week, some of us met a group of asylum seeker children who came to the House. We talked to them about their experiences, and they made that point.

Schools say that they need support in these matters, and of course they do. Many schools have developed considerable expertise in dealing with asylum seeker children. I have spoken to head teachers in deprived inner-city areas who said that the presence of motivated asylum seeker children lifts their school rather than depressing it.

Mr. Prosser: I share that experience. Schools that act properly and tolerantly find that asylum seeker children enhance their whole ethos. However, is it sensible and practical to supply the support mentioned by my hon. Friend at perhaps three or four sites in the same area?

Mr. Gerrard: It is a practice that has been going on for years in my local education authority and many others in inner cities. Many London schools have children from ethnic minorities, and a variety of languages are spoken, not only by asylum seeker children. Support is essential to the entire ethos and education system in such schools.

Glenda Jackson: It is not unusual for primary schools in my constituency and, indeed, in the whole borough of Camden, to find that more than 57 languages were spoken among their pupils. I remember that when Labour was in opposition, groups of London-based colleagues argued for the retention and expansion of section 11 money, which gave precisely that kind of support to children whose mother tongue was not English.

Mr. Gerrard: That mirrors the experience of many of us.

I turn now to the six-month time limit, and I shall simply tell the House what the asylum seeker children we met said. When we asked them how they would have felt if they had been in a centre for six months and had then gone into a mainstream school, they said, "When you are a child, six months is a very long time." We should not forget that.

The other issue that has not been addressed is the question of what education is about. I am sure that it would be possible to recruit teachers to teach the national curriculum in an accommodation centre, but education is not just about what is in the curriculum. It is about the social interaction within a school and children learning to get on with one another. The children to whom I have talked who are not asylum seekers often make positive comments about what they, as well as the asylum seeker children, can gain from that interaction.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does my hon. Friend agree that children from asylum seeker

families who go to mainstream schools often help to educate the other children in the broadest way? They enable them to have a greater understanding of the situation. Mainstream education also helps to prevent the isolation of the families of those children by making others in the schools and outside aware of the difficulties that they may face.

Mr. Gerrard: My hon. Friend is right. The Minister talked about the difficulties that some of these children face in school, such as racial abuse and being abused as they walk to school. If children have such difficulties, we must sort those schools out, because they will have them whether they go to the schools immediately they come into the country or after three, four, five or six months in an accommodation centre. That problem needs sorting out in the school. I would not for one moment underestimate the hard work that is needed in schools to deal with a variety of children, but the positive experience described to us by many teachers convinces me.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gerrard: I shall give way, but I do not want to speak for too long.

Mr. Hall: Will my hon. Friend take it from me that what he has just described is exactly the experience of many schools in Bedford and Kempston? Schools are delighted to impose and develop policies of integration that are contrary to segregation, and they see the presence of a small number—that is what it is—of asylum seeker children as a great opportunity for the whole school. Those schools are asking not so much for support to teach asylum seeker children, because that is their job and what schools are for, but for support to assist the parents of those children to understand English better and to understand the purpose of education.

Mr. Gerrard: That is a well-made point.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said, but I cannot help but feel, in my cynical way, that he is putting too positive a gloss on what Home Office Ministers are trying to do. I suspect that the Home Office does not want these children to put down roots in the local community. It does not want them to go to school with kids who live in the community, because if their parents were refused permission to stay in the United Kingdom, the Home Office would have to deal with appeals such as those my hon. Friend and I present on behalf of those parents, when we say, "The children are now part of the local community and it would be a disgrace to remove them, so let them and their parents stay." Does my hon. Friend think I am too cynical?

Mr. Gerrard: I would never accuse my hon. Friend of being too cynical. He has hit on an important issue. The Minister did her best to paint a positive picture of how an accommodation centre could be run, and I would not attribute base motives to her. However, if we step back, the key debate about accommodation centres has never been about the best mechanism for supporting asylum seekers. It has been about process. The Home Office's approach is "We want a process enabling us to make decisions quickly and to keep track of people". All the questions about support are something of a side issue.

I do not believe we can argue that segregation is in the best interests of the child. Others, I know, will have read the annual human rights report from the Foreign Office, published last month. According to a section about Roma,

> "School segregation is a particularly severe form of racial discrimination against the Roma in some Central and Eastern European countries and for children of asylum seekers in the UK".

The report is saying that children come here who have been victims of discrimination and segregation in other countries—and what are we going to do with them? The minute they arrive, we are going to segregate them again. How can we justify that?

5.15 pm

Simon Hughes: I know that we have only about 40 minutes left. I shall try to be as speedy as the last two speakers.

First, let me echo the general point made strongly by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard). The whole perspective is now wrong. I deal with a huge number of immigration and asylum cases, which constitute between a third and half of my constituency case load. It is the administration of the system that needs reform. Every week I deal with people whose papers have been lost or whose names have been confused—people who desperately need to leave because of an illness, a bereavement, a funeral or a marriage, but cannot break through the system. Others are trying to come here for similar reasons.

It would be better if we devoted only half our current effort, let alone the same amount, to improving the current system. Politicians may not be experienced in many respects, but the Chamber today contains all the experience anyone would ever require to recommend a system that would work for all our constituents. That is the priority; this is, in a sense, merely a distraction. It is a distraction for another reason: we are talking about a pilot scheme involving 3,000 of about 80,000 applicants a year. Notwithstanding what the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* would have us believe, some 50 per cent. of those applicants are granted the right to stay.

We have been trying to argue for intelligent solutions. The good news is that we have made some progress, as the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) pointed out. Liberal Democrats know that locations that are [illegible]s from mixed communities and from services, [illegible] middle of nowhere, are not right. That is why we supported the amendment that was passed in the Lords, and will vote today to retain the requirement for appropriate locations. We will happily vote with the Conservatives on that. If services are to be accessible, whether they are on site or brought in, they need to be in communities that are more likely to be accommodating.

The Government, sadly, have not responded. I heard and understand the Minister's argument, but I do not accept it. I am sorry that the proposals for centres in

[Simon Hughes]

Nottinghamshire and the west midlands are still on the table, because we do not consider either of those locations appropriate.

Beverley Hughes: Let me point out to the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) that it is an implicit and indeed enforceable principle of administrative law that the Secretary of State must exercise his or her powers reasonably. The idea presented earlier that any Secretary of State could decide on the location while knowing, perversely, that it was unsuitable is nonsense.

Simon Hughes: To be fair, I must say that that was not the case argued from the Conservative Front Bench. The amendment proposes that an accommodation centre

"shall be established only when the Secretary of State is satisfied that the proposed location is suitable to the needs of the persons to be accommodated therein."

That gives considerable latitude. It is not over-restrictive. If I had drafted it, I would not have come up with those words.

Sir Michael Spicer: The decision on Throckmorton is welcome, but it has been reached on the ground of the difficulty of purchasing land, not on grounds of needs and suitability, so the Government took the decision on the wrong grounds.

Simon Hughes: To be fair, the reason for the decision was in part the lobbying and in part the difficulty in acquiring the land and in getting planning permission, which should have meant that the proposed centres were out of the frame. I know it is difficult. That is why some of us said that those reception centres should not be as big as planned. I have argued for reception centres but always contemplated that they would accommodate 200 or 250 people and that they would be in existence for a short time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) said, they should not be like a camp, but if they accommodated 750 or 1,000 people, they would be. They would not be personal but institutionalised. That is why we are sad that, although the Government have accepted a pilot scheme accommodating a smaller number, which is nearer to 250, they have still kept in the frame two reception centres accommodating a larger number.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying but is he not concerned that reception centres in any form become a target for racist attacks? The unhappy experience in Germany has been that a number of asylum seekers living in hostels have been brutally attacked. They were easily located because the fascists knew where to find them.

Simon Hughes: I understand that argument, which is a hugely important issue. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the trouble is that the dispersal system has hardly been friendly and welcoming. People have been dispersed literally around the country and have not been supported. For example, they have had no one from their own language group to offer support. We must try to find some alternative to the current arrangements. We have argued that appropriate locations for small centres should be found to accommodate people for a short time when they first arrive. In communities such as the hon. Gentleman's and mine, people are used to lots of people coming and going. I hope that the new centres will not be the focus of antagonism and racism, which is the worst risk in any of the provisions.

On Report, we argued to the Home Secretary—I moved an amendment—that we knew that we could not get from the present terribly long-winded system to the system we would like in two minutes, so a six-month maximum time limit, with an opt-out to give a bit of flexibility after three months, would be acceptable. That is what the Minister has come back with.

In the Lords, to try to get the maximum agreement between the parties, we moved towards the Conservatives' position and they towards ours and we proposed a four-month limit, which we hope is achievable—I share the view of the right hon. Member for West Dorset—but the proposal for a six-month limit is greatly welcome. It will set a discipline. I hope it will deal with many of the problems that we have all identified which keep cases going unnecessarily for far too long. The new proposal marks progress and we will not disagree with the Government.

Amendment No. 21, on which we will not force a vote, refers to the occasions when the Secretary of State gives himself power not to deal with a case. That proposal is important to many of us who believe that each case must be dealt with fairly. The amendment says:

"provision . . . may provide for an application not to be considered where the Secretary of State is not satisfied that the information provided is complete or accurate or that the applicant is co-operating".

We all know the danger of a case being rejected on a formality, not on its substance. Far too many cases fail not because someone does not have a good case but because they did not sign the form on the right page or whatever. I seek an assurance from the Minister that the terms of Lords amendment No. 21 do not fall below the standards that are being negotiated at a Europe-wide level in the proposal for a Council directive laying down minimum standards on the reception of applicants for asylum in member states. We must ensure that we have common standards that accept good cases on their merits and do not turn them down by some defective process.

5.30 pm

The other issue on which an accommodation has been reached concerns legal advice. We cannot provide a proper service for asylum seekers without providing proper legal advice. That is why my hon. Friends and I will argue against the requirement to go abroad to make an appeal. That is a nonsense of a system—people cannot make a proper appeal from abroad. The Minister responded to the compromise position in Lords amendment No. 28, but my concern is that simply giving someone the name of the Refugee Legal Centre or the Immigration Advisory Service might be considered as discharging the obligation to provide legal advice. We need some reassurance that "legal advice" means real legal advice from competent individuals on site, so that people can ensure that their rights are not lost.

There are many other issues to which this huge group of complicated amendments gives rise, but I want to finish by discussing education—the issue that has proved the most controversial in this House and in the other place. As Ministers know, I said that, provided that the time involved was very short, I might be able to accept the idea of educating children on site. I am conscious that that was never the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough; indeed, many others in my party were unhappy that insufficient guarantees had been provided in that regard. In the Lords, we sought the guarantees that are effectively encapsulated in the relevant amendment before us. We argued that local education authorities should take the lead in education: that they should decide whether they have the capacity, and whether such schooling should be provided in an accommodation centre. Such a process could be subject to Ofsted, and to inspection by qualified teachers.

Those are the things that we all want for asylum seekers in schools in London—I am the chairman of governors in one such school—and elsewhere. We hoped to make sufficient progress on that issue in the Lords, but in the end we did not. That is why, when the Bishop of Portsmouth's amendment was moved, we decided that, if the Government cannot deliver, we would support the bishops and insist that such provision be offered by LEAs. We voted accordingly, as did some Labour and Conservative Back Benchers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough and I have worked on this issue. We have talked to our local government colleagues and, indirectly, to Labour local government colleagues. The hugely widespread view exists that education should be the responsibility of LEAs. For example, if Worcestershire LEA were unable to provide education on a particular site, it could call on the expertise of other LEAs. If such provision still could not be made, Worcester could enter into a contract with the private sector. It is LEAs who should have such responsibility. They know best—they are the ones on the ground.

I accept that Opposition amendments are always liable to the argument that their drafting is flawed, but I am saddened by the Minister's not accepting the principle behind ours. I am also saddened because, in the end, the Home Office position won against that of the Department for Education and Skills. The Home Office's view was that it must run matters and contract out the service. Our view is that the education service should run things and supply the service, wherever it may be. We will therefore press our amendment to a vote, and we hope that colleagues will support it. It would give LEAs the lead, and if it is defeated, we will support the position that we supported in the Lords. We will do so not because it reflects the common view of us all, but because, unless the Government can produce adequate guarantees, their proposal should not be accepted by this place or the other place.

Mr. Prosser: In my constituency, we already have an induction centre, a removal centre and accommodation for more than 200 unaccompanied minors. So I am very aware of the impact—I have seen it and felt it—of placing such facilities in areas where they are not welcomed with open arms by all residents. Things are much better in Dover now, but we went through some difficult times. In the light of that background, I certainly welcome the Minister's announcement concerning flexibility in respect of the size—and, to some degree, the location—of accommodation centres. In my experience, numbers—the number of asylum seekers entering an area, compared with the total indigenous population—are everything.

I keep closely in touch with Dover's migrant helpline, so I get the monthly figures for people coming through the port, and the total for those who have actually settled: those who are in the induction centre, in the removal centre, and in the centre in which unaccompanied minors are kept. I can almost estimate the numbers of asylum seekers in Dover from the atmosphere at my surgeries and street stalls in the centre of the town. If there are many people seeking refuge, the queue of local people with complaints is long. Most of the complaints are about practical matters, such as difficulties with local services or with getting children into local schools. We have already debated the issue of schooling children in areas that do not have the provision to meet demand. Numbers are important and that is why I am glad to see more thought put into the problems.

On the issue of the provision of education support, I have already mentioned that we experienced real difficulties when more children were coming into Dover than could be accommodated in local schools. In practice, it is the less popular schools in the more deprived areas—and east Kent still has areas of serious deprivation—that are required to take in the asylum-seeker children. Those children bring enormous riches to the schools and it is a joy to visit the schools that are doing things properly and well, and to see the children relating to each other. I remember a local Dover boy telling me the story of an asylum seeker and his trek from Kosovo. Such examples warm the heart.

To return to practicalities, the resources of schools are still limited. We must support schools but we cannot support all of them with interpretation provision. Interpretation services are necessary from the beginning, because communication is necessary before the children begin to pick up the language. We cannot supply that resource in my constituency on the necessary number of sites.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) questioned my hon. Friend the Minister about whether the changes were being proposed because schools were not treating asylum-seeker children properly, and if so, whether we should in fact complain to the Department for Education and Skills. I agree that we should complain, but it is true that some schools are not welcoming children from asylum-seeker families properly. Two years ago, when things were more difficult in Dover, I went to address a school group on the role of a Member of Parliament. We should have had a friendly exchange, but for an hour I listened to questions from young children, aged nine and 10, that were framed in the most pejorative terms. All the myths that are peddled by papers such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* were churned up. I was asked, "Why do asylum-seeker children get free buses to

[Mr. Prosser]

schools? Why don't asylum seekers have to tax their cars? Why do the Government give asylum seekers free tokens?"

Mr. Coleman: I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend. Is he seriously suggesting that the best way to deal with the lies and propaganda of certain tabloid newspapers is to segregate the children of asylum seekers, so that they do not have the chance to mix?

Mr. Prosser: No, of course not. Indeed, since I made approaches to my local education authority, matters have improved. The situation will never be perfect and the reality is that not all schools are performing well in that area now. As the Minister said, the picture is not completely rosy.

Jeremy Corbyn: Is my hon. Friend able to say something about the role played by local newspapers in the Dover area, because they did much to foment racism against Roma people and other people arriving? Is it not the duty of the House to tell every local education authority and every school that it is their duty to promote mutual respect, support and integration, instead of bowing to racist pressures?

Mr. Prosser: My hon. Friend is right. One former editor of the *Dover Express* went into the gutter with his attacks on Romany families and asylum seekers in general. He linked asylum seekers with bootleggers and drug smugglers, describing them all as human sewage and saying that we did not have the resources to flush them down the drain. That is how low that newspaper went for a time. The editor has been sacked and, although it is not perfect, the paper is much better.

In Dover, people are genuinely concerned about the practical problems that they face in a town that they sometimes feel is being overwhelmed by asylum seekers. They feel threatened, as often happens when there is a perceived threat. Education for asylum-seeker children must be provided in a way that is safer and more practical. The proposal will benefit those children more than would be the case if they went to a mainstream school, as long as the period involved remains short.

In an earlier intervention, I noted that the head teachers of my local schools had asked whether education provision for asylum-seeker children should be centralised. At the time, many Romany people from the former Czech Republic were arriving in Dover. They would stay for two, three or four months before being sent home or moving on. The head teachers wondered whether the children involved were being best served by being put into mainstream education. In schools, the asylum-seeker children began to integrate with local children and to put down roots in the community, but they were then dragged out and sent home.

Ms Buck: Does my hon. Friend agree that the overwhelming majority of asylum applicants, including families with children, will continue to be taken through the dispersal system? Their service needs will continue to be met in the mainstream community, so some of the problems mentioned by my hon. Friend—and no one should be romantic and deny that they exist—will still have to be tackled head on. I feel strongly that asylum-seeking children should not be given a separate education, but I accept that that is a minority case and that we have to deal with service needs across the board in all the dispersed communities.

Mr. Prosser: I agree with nearly all those points. I support the proposals in the Bill because they can be regarded almost as a trial or a pilot scheme that will serve to test the waters. The proposals deal with 3,000 or so places in half a dozen sites. I think that they will be successful. The Government got it wrong with tokens, which I also supported. At least, the Government were big enough to admit that they had got the tokens scheme wrong and to change and improve it. The other contentious proposals in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 had to do with dispersal. That was disputed as hotly as this matter tonight, but it has been highly successful in Dover, east Kent and the south-east coast. We were in an unsustainable position, with the National Front holding marches and the British National party putting out literature. The problem of the numbers involved had brought us to a crisis. The 1999 Act's dispersal powers, under whose authority people were moved to other parts of the country, prevented that hostility from spilling over into more aggressive behaviour.

5.45 pm

Glenda Jackson: I entirely concur with my hon. Friend on dispersal. As someone who represents an inner-London seat, I know only too well the problems that were being experienced by asylum seekers regarding serious overcrowding in their accommodation. However, I argued, as did every refugee association in London, that dispersal alone would be useless and non-productive in affording assimilation to those who were granted refugee status in this country if they were not actively and intensively supported in the areas to which they were sent. That support was not forthcoming and I now see people coming back from those areas of dispersal, perfectly prepared to do without any kind of housing benefit and attempting to exist on the measly amount that they are afforded, because they simply cannot stand that sense of isolation. This scheme will, in my view, be exactly the same—under-resourced, underfunded and not thought through in any detail.

Mr. Prosser: The dispersal system has not been perfect; it has been good in parts, like the curate's egg. It has worked very well in some areas while in others it has been a disaster. I have had the same problem of people coming back to Dover, meeting up with friends and living there again, having been dispersed some time ago.

On the margin, the overall benefit of dispersal was that it made our position in Dover sustainable. Let me take that a stage further: surely it is because of some of the deficiencies and problems of the ad hoc dispersal system that we are now testing a system that will be much more structured and focused, giving us the ability to provide all the services that were not in place under the old system.

Other advantages of making central provision relate to health services and health screening, when local resources can become overwhelmed. Local authorities

and health authorities in areas such as Dover have recently started focusing on the need to introduce new asylum seekers and refugees into the medical system as they settle, to check them and ensure that their health needs are being provided for properly on a central basis. It is only since that happened that asylum seekers have received the support and care that they should have received from the start.

Jeremy Corbyn: The health issue is very important. I have come across a number of distressing cases in which general practitioners simply refuse to take asylum seekers on their lists until they have been pushed into it by the local health authority. The local papers then chip in and say that asylum seekers are dominating the casualty units in local hospitals. They have no alternative because GPs and the health service are failing them. It is a duty of the health authorities to provide a GP and health care for everybody.

Mr. Prosser: Absolutely. Who could argue with that? However, I keep pulling hon. Members back to the real world and to what is happening in practice. When we know that services have not been provided properly with the level of care necessary, we must find a different model. What is on offer is a different model. I accept that it is very much a trial or pilot scheme, which must be tested in the real world. However, with the changes that we have discussed and the assurances that we have had from the Minister, I am happy to support the motion.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall be as brief as I can, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) also has time to strive once more to catch your eye. I would say in passing that it shows the state to which the House of Commons has reduced itself that our timetabling is now so tight that when we consider amendments passed by an unelected House which has the time to debate these matters at leisure, our discussions are so truncated that we have one hour for all Back Benchers to consider a whole bundle of very important issues which, in my opinion, remain unresolved. However, that is for another day.

I confine myself to Lords amendment No. 17, which essentially bears on the suitability of these large, isolated, rural sites as accommodation centres for the holding of asylum seekers before what we hope will be quicker decisions on whether they are to be allowed to remain.

I want to make it clear that my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury, I and others welcome large parts of the Bill. We need a fair system of immigration control and a fairer system for deciding on the applications of asylum seekers. It must be effective and reach swift decisions, and should help us to integrate properly the people whom we want to accept as refugees from persecution, from wherever they come. It should also help us to remove as decently and in as civilised a fashion as possible those who have, unfortunately, no legal right to be in this country.

Nor do I adopt my position from an attitude of nimbyism. I support the idea of accommodation centres, but it is not the case that I would be wholly in favour of huge camp-like holding centres for refugees if only they were 50 miles down the road in somebody else's constituency. My constituents hold the same view. They, too, think that setting up such an institution in a rural part of Nottinghamshire is unsuitable, but that it would be equally unsuitable in any other rural part of the country.

Indeed, one part of the Home Office did not know what another part was doing, so six miles away, in the equally rural village of Whatton, it is proposing to double the size of a large prison that specialises in holding sex offenders. There is some debate about that, but there has been no opposition in principle from significant numbers of inhabitants of rural villages in my constituency. They accept that there is a duty to protect us from such offenders and also that there should be proper rehabilitation facilities in modern prisons. The arguments are about where the entrance should be and whether surface water will make flooding worse than it was before—but those are not matters that will ever trouble the House.

At Newton, on the other hand, it is proposed to set up, as a trial, a large accommodation centre, designed to hold in isolation for as short a time as possible a transient population of 750 people at any one time. We are told that that will offer a sensible means of dealing with the delicate problem of asylum seeking.

Amendment No. 17, about which the Minister seemed to take an ambiguous view, would not rule out the hon. Lady's proceeding with that policy if she can justify it. However, it provides that such policies should not proceed unless she and her colleagues are satisfied that the proposed location "is suitable" for the needs of the asylum seekers. What she resists is the idea that the Home Office and its Ministers should be subject to any check on such decisions.

The planning applications will go to a public inquiry where town and country planning issues can be debated—schools, buses, roads and so on—and questions can be asked about rural areas. However, the decision that that is a suitable way to handle 750 asylum seekers at any one time will not be a proper matter for an inspector appointed to a planning inquiry. It is a policy matter. We are told that it is unthinkable that Home Office Ministers might have to justify such a decision in a court of law and try to satisfy people who point out that the proposed location is not suitable to deal with the needs of asylum seekers.

I have to agree with Labour Back Benchers, among others. The last Department of which I would say "Heaven forfend that its decisions on the suitability of such measures should be exposed to any challenge before a court or an independent tribunal" is the Home Office, especially when it is dealing with immigration and asylum.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) anticipated some of my points. He asked why large rural camps were chosen. That relates to the atmosphere in which the policy was first introduced. It has to do with process; it has nothing to do with what we are talking about today—the educational needs of children or access to legal services. I shall not burden the House with precise descriptions of Newton in my constituency, just as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury will not have the opportunity to describe the rural areas of his constituency, but Newton was chosen for its isolation. It is a very tiny village.

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

The choice of such a rural area was designed to ensure that the Home Office was less likely to lose touch with large numbers of people who were waiting for asylum decisions. They would be less likely to vanish and get lost during the asylum process. When the policy was announced, the then Minister obviously fondly imagined that as all the inhabitants would be required to be in the centre at 11 o'clock at night—no doubt, at roll call—if they missed overnight residence, their application would be turned down and they would be turned away. I suspect that the Home Office now has legal advice that it cannot do that. Just because people refuse to live in a camp at RAF Newton, the Home Office cannot tell them that it will not consider their application for asylum. That was the original idea, however, and since then the Home Office has been struggling to maintain that it would be common sense to hold a large group of assorted nationalities, some families and some single people, in an isolated accommodation centre, telling them that most of them will be deported.

The Lords held a long debate, by the end of which the Government, yet again, had no friend for their policy. From beginning to end, the Government have won no significant support for their policy either on the right or the left of the spectrum. My right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary cited a list of groups which had challenged the policy; for example, the Refugee Council, the Red Cross and the Immigration Advisory Service have no time for the policy. They are fearful that it will make it more difficult to deal in a civilised way with the individual problems of applicants and their families. Furthermore, there will undoubtedly be potential for tension and management problems in institutions as large and unattractive as holding centres for asylum seekers deep in rural England, far away from where any of the asylum seekers actually want to be.

Mr. Patrick Hall: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: No, because that is why people are being cut out of the debate. With any luck, I shall confine my speech to 10 minutes.

The Minister has moved to some extent, which is welcome. She has dropped one of the three proposed rural camps to make room for an urban experiment. I shall not be churlish and say that the last and greatest treason is to do the right thing for the wrong reason. I suspect that the Minister has dropped the Worcestershire camp because the Home Office cannot get it to run owing to local planning issues. The Government have probably reassessed the cost. They are spending millions on these so-called trials and they can probably only afford two big ones and a little one.

The Minister's third proposal has been urged on her from all sides. It is in line with successful experience on the continent. It is what legal advisers, educationists and most of the advisory bodies want—smaller camps that are nearer urban facilities. It is a belated step in the right direction that, minutes before the measure was subject to further parliamentary scrutiny today, the Government were prepared to make that modification.

If the Minister would tell us that, for the time being, she will set aside the big rural camps that nobody wants and assess whether a small urban camp can work in a civilised way, that would be a much better way to proceed. If she continues to insist that the Home Office should be immune from any review of its decision that big camps are suitable, we should support the Lords in their amendment No. 17.

Sooner or later, the Government will quietly abandon the policy. They have not won a friend for it from the moment they announced it. They are scrabbling on, through humiliation after humiliation, trying to defend their large-camps policy. They want to save face today by insisting on using their majority to reverse their lordships' amendment. However, I hope that they will find a dignified way of saving a bit of face by eventually adopting the more sensible policy that has been urged on the Minister by Labour Back Benchers with the same vigour as by Liberal Democrats and by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

6 pm

Mrs. Ellman: I have no doubt about the Government's good intentions in this matter, but my deep concerns come from my experiences of trying to assist asylum seekers in my area, where I have seen the practical problems of the present system. I am worried that those difficulties will be intensified in the pilot schemes. I want to refer to practical issues.

My first concern is about large detention centres in rural areas, in isolated places. I always have a fear about the treatment of people who are isolated from mainstream services. That makes them particularly vulnerable.

The big question is who will be running the centres. I am told that Ministers will be deciding who is contracted to run the centres, but who will advise Ministers? Will it be the National Asylum Support Service, which has stood by while the discredited provider in Liverpool, Landmark Liverpool Ltd., has offered an appalling service to asylum seekers? Only after three years of intensive campaigning, finally involving the chief constable of Merseyside, did NASS stop using the tower blocks to house asylum seekers in appalling conditions and under great duress.

I have no assurance whatever that under the proposed system—presumably where NASS-advised Ministers decide who should run these isolated detention centres—companies such as the discredited Landmark Liverpool will not be running a detention centre full of vulnerable people who are isolated from mainstream services. I have very deep concerns about that.

I accept that the Government are proposing a pilot scheme, but I have not heard from my hon. Friend the Minister how it will be assessed, on what criteria it will be assessed or, indeed, who will conduct the assessment. Will hon. Members be involved in deciding whether the scheme will cease to be a pilot? It seems to be the Government's intention that the pilot scheme will be a precursor to a general scheme based on such an arrangement. Indeed, some of my hon. Friend's remarks in introducing the amendments have given me reason to believe that that is so.

If we allow the proposal to go through, could the Minister—perhaps another Minister—in silence and away from public scrutiny take a decision to expand the system without hon. Members who are at the practical end of what happens having any input?

Mr. Patrick Hall: Some of the points that my hon. Friend rightly raises could be addressed when we see the outcome of the inquiry into the Yarl's Wood fire. Does she agree that it may be premature to take positions on the size of accommodation centres, never mind their location, until we see the outcome of that inquiry?

Mrs. Ellman: I share my hon. Friend's concern.

Above all, I am extremely concerned that the Government appear to be toughening their stance on asylum seekers and leaping into the unknown in a way that will evade the scrutiny which has always applied to the provision of mainstream services. We are dealing with vulnerable people; they deserve proper attention. I am extremely concerned about the implications of what we are being asked to agree.

Tony Baldry: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) for having been so concise.

I am privileged to chair the Select Committee on International Development, which I suppose takes me to more countries where there are potential asylum seekers than many hon. Members. One could begin to consider the issue from the perspective of asylum seekers themselves. Indeed, the Lords amendment does so. One concern that everyone in the House should have is that not a single organisation concerned with the welfare of refugees or asylum seekers supports what the Government are proposing. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the shadow Home Secretary, read out a letter dated 3 May from a lot of organisations, many of which we all support. Ministers have had since 3 May to convince those organisations that the Government's proposal is right. They have not won over a single organisation. I am sure that I am not alone in making that comment. Indeed, other hon. Members have said that even today the Refugee Council has been lobbying Members, seeking to persuade us that the Government need to adopt another approach.

The Home Secretary—I do not mean this pejoratively—is an honourable man, and the Minister has had the decency to listen to those in the communities involved, but they are committed to the trial. I am sure that everyone in the House would want a trial of this kind and importance to succeed, but knowing—I hope—my patch pretty well after representing it for nearly 20 years, and given that the proposed accommodation centre is to be located in a genuinely isolated area, I am concerned that anyone who is stuck there for up to six months will be bored out of their minds. Against that background, the experiment is likely to fail. I therefore very much hope that the other place will cause this House to think again if Ministers try to drive through the proposal with their large majority.

The Minister sought to give the impression that the Government were making concessions. They have not made any concessions on accommodation centres; they are still intent on establishing large, 750-person accommodation centres in rural areas. The Minister did say in her opening comments that the Government intended to abide by the planning system and to acknowledge whatever the planning inspector had to say. It may be of help if I tell her that only today residents in my constituency, together with a house builder, have lodged a writ in the High Court seeking judicial review against Ministers' decisions not to conduct an environmental impact assessment. Clearly, that judicial review will have to be heard and determined before there can be any public inquiry. Nevertheless, I certainly welcome the fact that there will be a full and proper public inquiry, as indeed do the 10,000 or so of my constituents who petitioned Parliament asking for it, and at least town and country planning matters will be considered by an independent inspector.

I ask the Secretary of State and those on the Treasury Bench to reconsider the policy of establishing very large accommodation centres in remote rural areas, because I fear that against that background the experiment is likely to fail. Of course Ministers may easily say to me or other hon. Members that I would make such comments in seeking to represent the concerns of my constituents over many issues that I do not have time to go into, or would point out the extra statutory burdens that might fall on district and county councils, about which they are understandably concerned, especially against the background of the Government's cutting their grants. Ministers can discount what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and I have had to say, but why on earth are they discounting the comments of Amnesty International, the Law Society, the Refugee Council and the Immigration Advisory Service, which deal with refugees and asylum seekers daily?

One would have expected those organisations at least to reach some compromise with the Government on this issue, or the Government to move some way towards those bodies' concerns, but all that Ministers have done is to say that, in addition to the very large centres that they intend to establish, there might be, as part of the experiment, other smaller centres. That does not meet the concerns that have been raised by all those organisations.

If the Government choose to drive through their proposal by the weight of their majority in this House, I hope that, given that the issue is so serious and that so little attention seems to have been paid to the organisations most concerned with the welfare of refugees and asylum seekers, the other place will yet again cause this House to think about what we are doing.

Glenda Jackson: I associate myself with the remarks of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on the issue of the present inefficiencies of the Home Office in dealing with asylum seekers.

The bulk of this debate has been concentrated on those who will be coming into this country for the first time and on how we will deal with them. I should like to raise the plight of so many of my constituents who have been in this country for a considerable number of years—eight years is not unusual—and who are still

[Glenda Jackson]

awaiting a final decision on their applications. The processing of appeals is taking longer and longer. Once an appeal is granted, the relevant paper that informs the asylum seeker of that is lost or delayed. Passports are lost; travel documents and applications are lost.

Linked to that is this vital question: why are we going down the road of vastly expensive accommodation centres, which no one wants and no one in their right mind thinks will be a success, when we might spend a fraction of that money to employ a minority of the people involved to improve the present system, so that it does indeed become firm, fast and fair? Currently, it is none of those things.

The central issue is the abomination of educating the children of asylum seekers outside mainstream schools. That seems to me to be unutterably heinous, and the practicalities strike me as absolutely absurd. The Home Office briefing talks about structuring classes for children dependent on their age. That presupposes that every intake of would-be asylum seekers has the relevant number of children of a certain age to create a proper class. That is highly unlikely. It is also highly unlikely that all those asylum-seeking children will speak only one language. It is entirely possible that they will be attempting to learn English when no one around them—let alone the person who is teaching them—speaks even their own mother tongue.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): Did not my hon. Friend say earlier that there was a primary school in her area in which 57 languages were spoken? Does that not defeat her argument?

Glenda Jackson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. The majority of children in those primary schools, in some of which more than 57 languages are spoken, have English as their mother tongue. If a child spends most of its day within a mainstream school, the language it will hear most consistently is English. A child will not most consistently hear English if it is kept in an accommodation centre.

It is wholly unreasonable to believe that the fears of a child who is potentially traumatised when it first enters this country will suddenly be excised when it is placed in what is, to all intents and purposes, a prison. It might be a very nice, well run prison, but it is most certainly—

It being two and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 183.

Division No. 346] **[6:12 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*

Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*

Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and Mr. Mark Hoban

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day], proceeded to put forthwith the remaining Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings to be concluded at that hour.*

Government amendments (a) and (b) to Lords amendment No. 28 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 28, as amended, agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 19 disagreed to.

Clause 15

SUPPORT FOR DESTITUTE ASYLUM-SEEKER

Lords amendment: No. 20, in page 9, line 16, at end insert—

", and

(c) there is a place available in an appropriate maintained school for any dependant of school age"

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 96.

Division No. 347] **[6:29 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian

Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

NOES

Allan, Richard
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caton, Martin
Clapham, Michael
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dismore, Andrew
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Efford, Clive
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
McDonnell, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Julie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Perham, Linda
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Robert Smith and
Jeremy Corbyn

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 25 and 26 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 19, 25 and 26 made.

Lords amendment No. 38 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (e) to the words so restored made.

Lords amendment No. 39 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) to the words so restored made.

Lords amendments Nos. 41, 42 and 44 disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 18, 21 to 24, 27, 29 to 37, 40 and 43 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Clause 61

SERIOUS CRIMINAL

Lords amendment: No. 104, in page 34, line 3, leave out from "is" to end of line 5 and insert

"convicted in the United Kingdom of an offence, and either—

(a) the offence is one for which the maximum period of imprisonment is ten years or more, or

(b) the offence has been specified for the purpose of this subsection under subsection (3A)."

Mr. Blunkett: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may consider Lords amendment No. 105, amendment (c) thereto and Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendment No. 106, amendment (a) thereto, Government motion to disagree thereto and Government amendments (a) to (e) in lieu, Lords

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

amendments Nos. 107 and 108, and Lords amendment No. 109, Government motion to disagree thereto and Government amendments (a) to (d) to the words so restored.

Mr. Blunkett: There appears to have been an interesting misunderstanding. As I understand it, their lordships did not after all intend to prevent us from disqualifying serious criminals, and I am very relieved to hear it. We might therefore gain agreement that there should be a clear presumption sending a clear message that those committing known and serious crimes will be disqualified.

However, I accept that Lord Kingsland made a valid point in saying that, as well as a clear definition so that everyone would understand it, there should be a schedule of offences that may fall outside the specific, defined sentence that is applicable, but which would constitute serious offences. Lord Kingsland referred to

> "the bizarre situation that . . . a person sentenced to 18, 21 or even 23 months for dealing in drugs or for a sexual offence against a child would not be presumed to be a serious criminal."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 October 2002; Vol. 640, c. 356.]

I recognise that that is unacceptable. Although my presumption is that the judiciary, especially in relation to forthcoming legislation following the Queen's Speech, would always have sent such criminals into custody for more than two years, I accept that there may be some doubt. We are therefore prepared to accept a schedule that would deal with such serious offences. I stress that it would be about serious offences and not trivialities, and we would want to assure and reassure the House that that would be the case.

6.45 pm

Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary has confirmed that the existing law ensures that a court can recommend deportation of anybody convicted of a serious offence under the Immigration Act 1971 and that that would follow as a matter of course. The court has power to recommend deportation and he can act on such a recommendation.

Mr. Blunkett: A judge could recommend deportation, but we are entirely in the hands of individual judges as to whether that happens or whether they send people to jail for the oddest things, such as trying to get out of the country because their papers were incorrect in the first place. There have recently been some very interesting judgments.

I am trying to deal with this House, and not someone else, taking responsibility for determining that a serious criminal should be disqualified and removed from the country. I do not accept the Liberal amendment insisting that a custodial sentence of 10 years or more should have to be imposed for an offence to be deemed serious—far from it. Most people outside using reasonable definitions would consider that the provisions, including a defined set of circumstances under the schedule, would make sense.

I hope that their lordships accept that we have taken on board entirely the spirit of what they debated and now appear to have intended and that we can now agree. Of course, offences committed overseas would not include acts that are not offences here, so we will not deal with crimes that are considered in some countries to be political and will not, therefore, disqualify people who have a perfectly legitimate and serious case that they are risk of death or torture. Such people would not be detrimentally affected. It is in that spirit that I ask the House to accept the motion to disagree.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): It is always a pleasure to talk to the House with so much support from one's colleagues. *[Laughter.]* I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) in his place to give me that support.

The Home Secretary will agree that it is a pity that such an important clause can be scrutinised in the House for only about 15 minutes. That is the way in which we operate, but it is perhaps unfortunate. The right hon. Gentleman knows that the Bill contained no such clause on Second Reading and that it did not appear in Committee. He also knows that, in effect, it was rushed through unscrutinised with 14 or more other clauses and several schedules just before 10 pm on 21 May. That is a pity, because he is a great supporter of debate in this House. I hope that he accepts that I speak with some sincerity in saying that is a pity that such important issues sometimes do not get the opportunity to be fully debated.

Opposition Members appreciate what the Home Secretary has said. We think that the clause as it was originally drafted, so as to involve a sentence of two years or more, was flawed. Lord Kingsland pointed out in the House of Lords on several occasions that the presumption of being a serious criminal would apply only where a British court imposed a two-year prison sentence. That leads to potential difficulties, as the Home Secretary readily acknowledges. Wearing my judicial hat—I was regarded on Monday as a serious sentencer, but on Wednesday I shall perhaps be viewed as a less serious sentencer—I appreciate that there is a potential discrepancy in sentences that different judges hand down for the same crimes.

Another problem is that the refugee convention refers to especially serious crimes but the Government's test in the Bill originally related not to the seriousness of the crime but to the punishment. Under the Government's original proposals, a person who had been sentenced to two years for assault would be a serious criminal, but not someone who had been sentenced to 18 months for child pornography offences.

The sentences imposed by courts abroad posed an additional problem. They might vary tremendously from those imposed in this country, and might or might not relate to the seriousness of the crime. When their lordships changed the Bill, the media reports of the Government's defeat in the House of Lords were based on factually incorrect information. They claimed that the amendment that was passed simply raised the threshold for presumption as a serious criminal from a sentence of two years to one of 10 years. However, we were discussing crimes for which a 10-year sentence could be imposed.

Whenever I have stood at the Dispatch Box, the Home Secretary has always been kind to me. However, he was a little unkind, if press reports are true, in raging

at the tactics of Conservative peers who joined the Liberal Democrats to block moves giving the Government the right to deport refugees who had committed serious crimes. He apparently pledged to reverse such "silliness". He now knows that the Conservative party in the House of Lords was doing its best to introduce genuine sense to the proceedings. The vote on the clause was won by 77 votes to 71. Many of right hon. Gentleman's supporters were absent that night.

Conservative Members in the House of Lords tabled another amendment on Third Reading to give the Home Secretary power to add a schedule of offences when the maximum penalty was less than 10 years but he believed that the offence was sufficiently serious to warrant the perpetrator's inclusion in the definition of a serious criminal.

Matters have moved on. The House of Lords had a mature debate about the subject, with the result that the Bill reverts to us in a different state. The Conservative proposal was that someone would constitute a serious criminal if he or she were convicted of either an offence for which the maximum sentence is 10 years or more, regardless of the sentence received, or any other offence specified by the Home Secretary as one to which the presumption of serious crime should apply, for example, child abduction, child pornography and drug dealing.

The Government's current proposal states that a person is deemed to be convicted

> of a particularly serious crime and to constitute a danger . . . if he is convicted of an offence specified by order of the Secretary of State, or he is convicted outside the United Kingdom of an offence and the Secretary of State certifies that in his opinion the offence is similar to an offence specified".

That is fair enough, and I hope that the Home Secretary will accept that Conservative Members believe that the proposal is good. Perhaps it is not perfect, but it moves the debate forward.

We believe that Government amendment (a) fulfils the convention's principles. We previously doubted whether the Government's proposals did that. However, proposed new subsection (3B)(b) provides that the order

> "shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament."

I take it that that means that one would need to pray against it rather than using affirmative resolution procedure. Some people claim that the affirmative resolution procedure might be more satisfactory.

When the provision was first included in the Bill on the last night of Committee, we had no chance to consider it carefully. A combination of peers has examined the matter and pointed out the flaws. Consequently, the Home Secretary has presented a proposal that we regard as satisfactory. We are grateful, and I thank right hon. Gentleman for it.

Simon Hughes: We are in difficult territory. As the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) suggested, the House of Commons has not debated the matter during the Bill's passage, although it was discussed at length in the Lords. When the provision left this place, I understood that those convicted of any offence and sentenced to more than two years would be caught by it. However, the events that the hon. Gentleman described ensued, and resulted in a different definition of offence and maximum offence, and the provision for a schedule. On advice, my colleagues and I take a different view.

I do not argue with the Home Secretary that one has to breach a threshold of 10 years for the offence to be serious. Our amendments have been probing. However, the matter does not need specific legislation because it is governed by international obligations and current law. The courts are allowed to deport people and the Home Secretary can get rid of people if they pose a risk to the country's security. We do not need to go down the road proposed by Government amendment (a).

We believe that although it is right for the Government to be able to protect us against those who have offended—

It being three and a quarter hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Lords amendment No. 104 disagreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day], proceeded to put forthwith the remaining Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings to be concluded at that hour.*

Lords amendments Nos. 105 and 106 disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 106 be made.—*[Mr. Blunkett.]*

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 51.

Division No. 348] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale and Darwin)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*

Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dan *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Derek Twigg

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John

Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Robert Smith and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke

Question accordingly agreed to.

Government amendments (b) to (e) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 106 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 109 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (d) to the words so restored to the Bill agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 107 and 108 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords Amendment: No. 84, after clause 48, to insert the following new clause—*Late claim for asylum: refusal of support.*

Simon Hughes: I beg to move amendment (b) to the Lords amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendments (c) to (f), amendment (a), Lords amendment No. 86 and amendments (a) to (c) in lieu thereof, Lords amendment No. 99 and the Government motion to disagree thereto.

Simon Hughes: We come now to financial support for asylum seekers. I am conscious that, as a consequence of the guillotine constraints under which we are working, we have only a quarter of an hour to debate the amendments, and this House has not previously had an opportunity to deal with these matters because the measures were introduced in the House of Lords when the Bill was recommitted to a Committee. The Government produced these amendments, after the summer, at the end of the Report stage, and they are tightening the rules at the eleventh hour. In our view, those changes are unfair and likely to result in considerable hardship and lack of redress.

The Lords amendment states:

"The Secretary of State may not provide or arrange for the provision of support to a person under a provision mentioned in subsection (2) if...the person makes a claim for asylum which is recorded by the Secretary of State, and...the Secretary of State is not satisfied that the claim was made as soon as reasonably practicable after the person's arrival in the United Kingdom."

Amendment (b) would change the balance, so that the Secretary of State would have to be satisfied that there was undue delay in making the claim. There are many people who, through no fault of their own, do not immediately make an asylum application. It is not only Liberal Democrat Members who believe that; hon. Members on both sides of the House who deal with asylum cases know that there are such people, and current and previous Labour Front Benchers have said so in proceedings on earlier legislation. The right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said so when he was Home Secretary. The right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) sought to pray against orders that would have had the same effect as the Lords amendment because he was unhappy about them.

Most persuasively, the very good Committee of Members from all parties in both Houses, which we set up to deal with human rights issues, said of the Lords amendment that

"there is a significant risk that the new clause could lead to a violation of Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in cases where the circumstances did not amount to a violation of one of the Convention rights as defined in the Human Rights Act 1998... it is difficult to envisage a case where a person could be destitute without there being a threat of violation of Articles 3 and/or 8 of the ECHR. We reiterate that the Secretary of State has a duty under section 6 of the Human Rights Acts 1998 to avoid that risk. We draw this to the attention of each House."

7.15 pm

My experience is that people who come here who are ignorant or frightened of the system may well not come to the attention of the authorities for days or months. They are afraid to do so because they do not know what the consequences will be. The danger in the Bill—although, I hope, not the intention—is that many of those people will be ruled out from receiving financial support and from the ability to appeal against that decision because the Secretary of State could say that he was not

"satisfied that the claim was made as soon as reasonably practicable".

The phrase

"as soon as reasonably practicable"

means at the first available opportunity, which should be objectively defined. There should be an objective test, based on when the person knew that they were required to make a claim. I shall give the House one parallel. In civil litigation, where there is a three-year limit for action, people are entitled to start the clock not when they sustain the injury for which they are entitled to make a claim but when they become aware of their entitlement.

I hope that the House accepts that the Government should have to satisfy themselves that any delay is undue, unreasonable or unjustified. This case is simply put, but it has huge implications because, in the long term, the Secretary of State may be in breach of the convention. In the short term, however, I am more concerned that many deserving people who will otherwise be destitute will not be entitled to the support that we, as a rich country, must give them when they come to us looking for asylum.

Jeremy Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the number of people who will become destitute. Is he aware that there are already thousands of asylum seekers who, having been dispersed to other parts of the country, have removed themselves to London from a place of safety and are sleeping on people's floors? We have a situation, mainly in London, in which the very poor are trying to house the desperately poor in their rooms.

Simon Hughes: I agree. My experience from my constituency is that there are many people who do not claim support, do not receive it or are appealing against a decision so they are dependent on the charity of others in pretty much the same situation. The bigger danger is for people who have no one to look after them, because

[Simon Hughes]

they are likely to be out on the streets and open to abuse and exploitation. If we are trying to keep refugees and asylum seekers out of the hands of criminals, traffickers and exploiters, we are going the wrong way about it. I hope that the House will support amendment (b).

Mr. Blunkett: I ask the House to reject the amendment on the very precept put forward by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). He gave an example based on civil litigation, saying that the clock should start when we presumed that people had become aware of their condition. I presume that people who come to this country to escape from death and torture do so to claim asylum, and I presume that they will claim asylum when they get into the country.

There are people who fulfil other immigration and visa requirements and who remain here, sustaining themselves, for a long time, until they run out of money or their course finishes. They then claim asylum so that we may sustain them for a further period. We all agree, I hope, that they should be ruled out from receiving that support.

The question is how reasonable we are regarding people who come here but do not claim asylum at the port of entry. We need to be reasonable and to take into account the trauma that people experience. We need to allow a reasonable period before we presume that people have come into the country for another reason and have been sustaining themselves, then when they can no longer do so, have decided that the asylum system would sustain them, being more generous than the equivalent something-for-something welfare to work system.

We are saying to people, "If you have been here some time, by all means tell us how you got here, what your circumstances are, the means of entry and what you have been doing since you reached this country and we will provide you with support." That is what our proposals provide, and I think that that is reasonable. People with families will be sustained and those with special needs will be supported. That is in the proposal. People who have been in this country for some time and have decided to claim asylum can continue with that claim, but there is no reason on God's earth why we should sustain them. We should remember that those who choose to take part in the dispersal system receive not only sustenance, such as food and heating, but accommodation, equipment and other materials. As we do not automatically do the same for the indigenous population, it is not a lot to ask that we put these people on equal terms.

Annabelle Ewing *rose—*

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South) *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I give way to the hon. Lady.

Annabelle Ewing: I listened to the right hon. Gentleman's explanation of this provision and its apparent reasonableness, but if it is so reasonable why was the proposal introduced at the eleventh hour?

Mr. Blunkett: One reason was that the number of people who have been in the country a long time and have cottoned on to the new social security system has grown exponentially. The in-country claims are substantial.

Mr. Mullin: I am listening carefully to what the Home Secretary has to say on this point. He will understand that many of us are concerned that the proposal will lead to destitute asylum seekers. We want to be assured that there is sufficient flexibility in the system to cope with the hard cases that arise. Is my right hon. Friend able to offer any reassurance on that point? I acknowledge all the points that he made, but I would still like to be assured that those who fall through the system for whatever reason do not end up sleeping on the streets.

Mr. Blunkett: I think that our proposal to respond if people give us a complete and accurate account of their circumstances covers the point that my hon. Friend rightly makes. People are right to be concerned. Given the sparsity of time owing to the previous votes, I shall just show one commitment of good faith.

Considerable concern has been expressed about the amount that we provide to sustain mothers with young children and small babies. The Minister of State and I are announcing tonight that, from February, we will increase the amount by £3 for mothers with children between the ages of one and five, and by £5 for those with children under one, so that they can have healthy food and milk on the same basis as the Department of Health provides elsewhere. If new mothers can show that they cannot breast-feed, we will introduce their top-up immediately. We are desperately trying to provide a sensible balance.

Mr. Coleman: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way to my hon. Friend because I know that he has a particular concern.

Mr. Coleman: In the past, I have heard my right hon. Friend make comparisons between an intentionally homeless local authority case and the circumstances in these proposals. He asked if we do not offer this provision to the indigenous population, how, we can justify giving it to asylum seeker. I put it to him that if someone is intentionally homeless—every hon. Member will have had an intentionally homeless case in which the decision has been wrong—a number of possibilities are open to him. First, there is an appeal or a review. The briefing that some of us have received advises that there would be an appeal. Can my right hon. Friend clarify whether there would or would not be an appeal? Secondly, if I am an intentionally homeless person given that decision and I lose my appeal, I have the right to claim housing benefit and income support. The comparisons that my right hon. Friend made between the intentionally homeless member of the indigenous population and the destitute asylum seeker who is refused support do not hold up when we look at the facts.

Mr. Blunkett: Under our proposals, we are presuming that the people who claim late are accommodating themselves or are accommodated by others. They are not turning up as people who are homeless by dint of

being thrown out would turn up and ask for accommodation. We are dealing with late application for asylum, not destitution per se.

Jeremy Corbyn *rose—*

Mr. Gerrard *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Jeremy Corbyn: When this proposal was debated in the House of Lords, consideration was given to cases in which the situation in the country from which the person was fleeing had changed dramatically and they made a late application that could be considered. Could the Home Secretary explain to us under what circumstances such late applications would be acceptable?

Mr. Blunkett: If the in-country circumstances had changed, perhaps because there had been a coup, the individual presenting an asylum claim would legitimately believe that he was at risk of death or torture if he returned to his country of origin. It is the change that has taken place in-country that makes the difference in respect of the judgment. I think that that is fair and reasonable. If someone's home country has been taken over or the regime has changed to one that would threaten them, we do not intend to send them back. They would automatically have a legitimate right to claim asylum and to be supported from the moment they made that claim.

Mr. Gerrard: I was interested in what my right hon. Friend said earlier about the fact that the number of people applying late is increasing exponentially and that is why something had to be done. I tabled two written questions that were answered earlier this month, one of which asked about the dates at which people applied—less than three months, six months or 12 months—and was told that the information was not available. I was also told that there were no statistics available on the length of time asylum applicants have been in the United Kingdom before making an application for support. I am not sure where the evidence comes from. If we do not have an appeal as well, what will actually happen is that appeals will take place and they will be—

It being three and three quarter hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *put forward the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The House divided: Ayes 57, Noes 297.

Division No. 349] **[7:27 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Austin, John
Barrett, John
Berry, Roger
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Coleman, Iain
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Robert Smith and
Tom Brake

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry

Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roché, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and Joan Ryan

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day], proceeded to put forthwith the remaining Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings to be concluded at that hour.*

Lords amendment No. 84 agreed to [Special Entry].

Lords amendment No. 99 disagreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 86.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The House divided: Ayes 291, Noes 55.

Division No. 350] **[7:39 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin

Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Fraser Kemp

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*

Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Skinner, Dennis
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Robert Smith and Tom Brake

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 86 agreed to.

Mr. Blunkett: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I inadvertently gave the House the wrong age groups when I addressed the issue of new additional family support for healthy eating and milk. I was correct in saying that we are going to provide an extra £5 for babies under the age of one, but I should have said that the extra £3 was for those between the ages of one and three, not one and five. My apologies to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The whole House will have heard the Secretary of State's correction, which is now firmly on the record.

Clause 69

ADJUDICATORS

Lords amendment: No. 127, in page 39, line 17, at end insert

", and

( ) may appoint one or more adjudicators as Deputy Regional Adjudicator."

Beverley Hughes: I beg to move, that this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 128 to 153, 154 and amendment (a), 155, 156, 157 and amendments (a) to (f), 158 to 178, 179 and amendments (a) and (b), 180 to 183, 184 and amendments (a) and (b), 185 to 187, 188 and amendments (a) to (d), 189 to 191, and 215 and amendments (a) to (c).

Beverley Hughes: The amendments in this group are for the most part minor and technical and I do not intend to speak to them, although I will be happy to answer any questions. I should, however, explain why the Government tabled amendments to non-suspensive appeals provisions in clauses 82 and 101 which were fully discussed in the other place but which this House has yet to be able to consider. Without delaying the House, I hope that I can set the provisions in the context of what the Government are trying to achieve through their overall approach to asylum and immigration, as outlined in February's White Paper.

The strategy is threefold, and it is important to remember the three elements. The first is to return asylum to its proper purpose: a route through which people who are fleeing persecution can readily and easily be identified and, once they have gained permission to stay, be integrated properly and helped to settle here. So returning asylum to its proper purpose is a very important part of the strategy. The second element is the need to do a lot better at integrating refugees, including opening a gateway—with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—for people to come in directly from out of country. The third element, because we do welcome migrants generally, is the opening up of managed legitimate routes for economic migration.

Most Members will agree that we need to deal with the very large numbers who seek to remain here on the basis of asylum and human rights claims that are clearly unfounded, and whose motivation in coming has to do not with fleeing persecution but with other objectives—however understandable—that are outside the asylum system. The term "clearly unfounded" is not defined in legislation, but the courts have held that it constitutes a claim that is obviously without substance, or is bound to fail. An example would be those who come here for economic reasons, or those whose fears—even if true—would not amount to persecution, or to inhuman or degrading treatment. It is essential that clearly unfounded cases be identified and dealt with quickly. There can be no justification for allowing a person who has made a clearly unfounded claim to remain here to pursue a hopeless case.

We debated the arguments for introducing non-suspensive appeals at an earlier stage. The amendments to clauses 82 and 101 build on this provision by introducing a list of countries where a claim will be presumed to be clearly unfounded.

Simon Hughes: The Minister rightly points out that we had a general debate, and we shall come to the more specific view that the Government have taken in the Lords. Superficially, the argument is very appealing, but will she explain why the Government are proposing such a rigorous response in terms of their definition of manifestly unfounded cases? Throughout the 50 years for which we have been signed up to the refugee convention, people have regularly come from other democracies with cases that were found to be good ones. Most importantly, the Home Office's own statistics for this year show that about 40 per cent. of "manifestly unfounded" certificates are being overturned on appeal to the adjudicator. It seems that, when looked at more carefully, apparently manifestly unfounded cases are not unfounded. That would trouble anybody, and it is, I hope, a reason for proceeding much more carefully than the Government's proposals allow us to do.

Beverley Hughes: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, and it is a valid one, but he is not comparing like with like. Claims that have been dealt with will not go through the same system that we plan to use for the cases under discussion. I shall outline the system for the hon. Gentleman shortly, but I agree that we must ensure that the quality of the initial decision making, the care taken at that stage, and the building in of additional scrutiny are sufficient to ensure that decisions in cases so certified are robust and defendable. Those are very important points, and in view of the outcome of the cases that the hon. Gentleman outlines, we are building

that degree of rigour into the initial decision-making system. I shall explain to the hon. Gentleman exactly what the stages are shortly.

This country has a long tradition of considering every asylum claim individually to see whether a person would face persecution in his or her own country, and that will continue. In tabling these amendments, we do not rule out the possibility that a person from a generally safe country could be a refugee. However, the fact is that the vast majority are not refugees. This is true of the 10 countries that are the first in the queue to join the European Union. These countries—they are listed in the amendments—are all democracies. They have functioning criminal justice systems, respect for human rights and a commitment to dealing with elements in their society who target minority groups. For these countries, more than 90 per cent. of those who appealed against a refusal to grant asylum had their appeals dismissed. As Members will know, at a recent meeting in Luxembourg the Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted a declaration that member states should start from the presumption that any asylum application from a national of one of the 10 states is manifestly unfounded. We are therefore in step with our EU partners in adopting this measure. A significant number of asylum applications from these countries contributes to the total number that we are dealing with.

Vera Baird (Redcar): Do not the Minister's own figures make it perfectly clear that 10 per cent. of people who applied from white list countries did have a valid claim? Under this system, how will they be protected?

Beverley Hughes: People will enter into the non-suspensive appeal process, but that will not remove the possibility of their seeking judicial scrutiny of their case by applying for judicial review. If an application were made, such a person would not be removed until the application was determined. If the application were approved, they would not be removed pending the determination of the judicial review itself.

We must recognise that the fact that tens of thousands of people are using the asylum system has a serious impact on our ability to identify and integrate refugees. That introduces a degree of chaos into the system, and we really need to rationalise it. If we do nothing about these problems now, they will simply get worse as our EU partners take a firm stance, and the United Kingdom perhaps becomes a more attractive destination.

8 pm

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey mentioned safeguards. Those affected by the measure will have safeguards to ensure that their claims are properly considered. They will have access to legal advice while their case is being considered. Their application will be considered by a specially trained officer. The decision to refuse—if that is the decision—will be checked by a senior officer. And random quality testing of decisions will be carried out by a legally qualified person. However, the measure will make it clear that very few applications from those countries will have a valid claim.

Circumstances change, and there may come a time when other countries achieve the settled conditions that are enjoyed by those on the list of 10. In that case, if large numbers from one of those countries continue to seek asylum, it may be appropriate to add that country to the list. Clause 82 has constraints to ensure that other countries could only be added appropriately.

Mrs. Ellman: What powers will a Minister have to add other countries to the list and what scrutiny of that decision would take place?

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend will be aware of other provisions in the Bill for the establishment of an advisory group on in-country conditions. The Home Secretary has already made it clear that when he considers the range of evidence on the circumstances in particular countries that might justify inclusion in the list he will take the views of that group into account before reaching a decision. That decision would be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. Therefore, no country could be added without Parliament having debated and agreed its inclusion. Additions cannot be made unless the Home Secretary is satisfied that there is no serious risk of persecution in that state, or part of a state, and that removal to the country of the persons entitled to reside there would not be in contravention of the European convention on human rights. The opposite also applies: if circumstances change for the worse, the country can be removed from the list.

Simon Hughes: The Joint Committee on Human Rights, on which I sit with the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) and other colleagues, pointed out that the documentation considered by the European Commission, in its assessment of applicant countries, contained good reasons for concern about human rights matters in all those countries. For example, the Minister will remember that for Estonia the Joint Committee listed the following causes for concern:

"position of stateless persons, who constitute about 12.5% of the population; use of force by police; treatment, including arbitrary detention, of disabled and mentally ill persons".

For the Czech Republic, the causes for concern include:

"treatment of people in police custody; legislative discrimination against religious groups, especially minority religious groups; and widespread discrimination against Roma in education, housing and employment, despite attempts to improve the position".

Those are just two examples. Although those countries are applicant countries, they will not satisfy human rights tests for all their citizens or residents. I share the Joint Committee's concern that we are making presumptions that are unacceptable on human rights grounds, because they will be rebuttable in theory but not in practice.

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Gentleman has provided the answer to his own point. The presumption is for the generality of people in a country, but it is rebuttable. The terms of the measure acknowledge the possibility that any particular individual may be able to establish, on grounds of his or her experience, that the general presumption does not apply in that case. As I have explained—and I hope the hon. Gentleman will accept my assurances on this point—we want to certify only

[Beverley Hughes]

clearly unfounded claims. We do not want to certify individuals whose cases reach the European convention threshold. That is why we are taking great care in providing how certification decisions should be made, so that that eventuality is covered.

Fiona Mactaggart: If the Minister could give the House an assurance that she does not intend to certify the cases of Roma from the accession countries, many of us would have our fears allayed. I have cases from Women Against Rape and the Refugee Legal Centre involving Roma from many accession countries who have had their cases certified, but under the present arrangements, that certification has been overthrown and they have been granted asylum. It is the situation of the Roma in the accession countries that is causing the greatest concern to many of us.

Beverley Hughes: I have different experiences and I could cite different examples. In this country in the past few months, not a single application from a Czech Roma person has been successful. I do not claim that the Roma's circumstances are not difficult in some countries, but only in very limited circumstances will their claims reach the threshold of persecution or torture and inhuman treatment under the convention, or prove that the state in question cannot or will not protect them.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey will wish to speak on the amendments he has tabled, and I will be happy to give specific responses to any questions that he has. However, I shall make some general points now rather than address each amendment individually. There are two groups of amendments, one relating to clause 82 and one to clause 101, which seek to achieve the same objective. They try to remove the human rights claim from the clauses. As was acknowledged by some Liberal Democrats in the other place, the amendments are wrecking amendments, because the clauses could not work if the potential to make a human rights claim is taken out. That would undermine the purpose of both clauses, because anyone making a clearly unfounded asylum claim could get an in-country appeal right simply by lodging an equally unfounded human rights claim. Therefore, we will not accept those amendments.

Mr. Malins: I shall not detain the House for too long, but I wish to pose one question to the House. What is a safe country? Hon. Members will have been on holiday to countries that were perfectly safe for them but which might not have been so for some of their nationals. Equally, I suspect that we will have been to countries where the reverse applies—where we might have been in some danger, but nationals were not.

The Government have to perform a difficult balancing act. They want to speed up procedures and at the same time they want to be fair. I understand that. I have a high regard for the Minister, so I shall tell the House that the Opposition have no difficulty with the Government's proposals on these matters. However, we do have a few queries.

We discussed non-suspensive appeals a little in Committee, with the Minister's predecessor. Matters have progressed since then. The Bill reached Report stage in the House of Lords in a slightly different state. The so-called "white list" is set out in Lords amendment No. 188, and the prospect of the Secretary of State adding a state by order is very much in line with Conservative party thinking.

As always, however, the devil is in the detail. No hon. Member would want to send a person abroad to conduct an appeal if that meant that that person was being sent to severe danger and possible death. No decent person could ever want that, but it also makes absolute sense to speed the procedure up, so that a person whose case is unfounded can be told that he or she will be sent back to conduct an appeal from a country that is safe. Do we have bilateral agreements with the countries set out in Lords amendment No. 188 that mean that, following certification, we are able to send people back to those countries in the certain knowledge that they will be received and able to conduct an appeal from there?

I may be wrong, but my understanding is that we have bilateral agreements with Norway and Iceland. Do we have such agreements with any of the other countries? I do not think so, but I should be grateful if the Minister could tell me a little more about that.

We do not have long tonight for discussion of the nuts and bolts of these matters. I always enjoy discussing nuts and bolts rather than theory, but I hope that the Minister will give me—either this evening or in writing—a step-by-step guide to how the proposals will work in practice. All hon. Members feel strongly that we must make sure that a person who is certified and sent back to one of the listed countries should not be grossly disadvantaged. Such a person must be able to conduct an appeal, without prejudice or unfairness. If that person is not scuppered in that way, he or she will have a chance of mounting a proper appeal. I therefore want to ask the Minister a series of questions regarding the mechanics of certification and how the appeal procedure will work.

I shall deal first with certification. The phrase

"if the Secretary of State is satisfied"

crops up all over the Bill, but the House knows that the Secretary of State does not examine all the cases. He cannot do so. He delegates, and so the person who must be satisfied is the determining officer. The initial decision maker will be a Home Office official, and that is the person who must be satisfied in these matters.

The Minister has mentioned the special training and expertise that initial decision makers must have if they are to deal with these difficult matters. I asked a series of parliamentary questions earlier this year about initial decision makers. In January 2001, there were 761 initial decision makers in asylum cases in post, but the number had fallen in January this year to 697. I am sure that the number will have increased by now, and that the Minister will be preparing for the future by seeking to recruit more initial decision makers.

8.15 pm

In Committee, and subsequently, many hon. Members have told the Minister and the Home Secretary that it is vital to make high-quality initial decisions in asylum cases.

Mr. Mullin *indicated assent.*

Mr. Malins: The hon. Gentleman and I agree on that, as do all hon. Members. It is very important to get

matters right at the beginning, to avoid long-term problems. Getting matters right first time is very much in the interests of the Government and the country, and it is certainly in the interests of the asylum seeker.

In July, I asked the Minister what plans she had to increase and improve the training of initial decision makers in asylum cases. I was disappointed to be told that, at that stage, there were no such plans. I think that the position may have changed. Indeed, an answer that the Minister gave me later in the year suggested that there were moves afoot to "maintain and improve" the quality of initial decision on asylum applications. I am pleased about that. All the non-governmental organisations involved in this matter place great emphasis on getting the decision right at the beginning. Nowhere is that more important than in cases where the stakes are high, as they are for people who are to be removed from this country so that their appeals can be heard from abroad.

I want to ask a few questions about how the appeals will work in practice. In this country, if my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) or I were convicted of an offence in the court, we would go to our appeals in person. That has always been the tradition. We understand and agree with what the Government are doing, but the Minister must accept that the proposals represent a departure from the norm. It is not what we in this country have got used to in the legal or asylum systems over many years.

I want to put myself in the position of a person who arrives in this country and makes an asylum application. Let us say that I am from the Czech Republic, which is on the white list. I assume that an initial decision about my application will be made. How does that work? If the Minister cannot answer that tonight, I should be grateful if she could write me a note. After the initial refusal, I suspect that there will be a removal. Let us assume that I do not make any applications but that I am removed in any case. How quickly will that removal take place? Will I be at liberty in the period between the initial decision that goes against me and my removal, or will I be detained?

After the initial decision has gone against me, will I have the opportunity to take competent legal advice, either straight away or in the intervening period, however long that may be, about the prospects for my appeal and how it should be undertaken? Will I have to lodge all my appeal papers before I go? I will get a chance, I am sure, to see my lawyer before I go, but what about after I am removed, when I am in the Czech Republic? Are there any circumstances—I think that the Minister will confirm that there are not—in which the adjudicator can say, "I demand to see this person personally"? I do not think that that can happen, but we need it spelled out. What about my legal help and advice after I have gone, if I have gone?

In October, I asked the Minister about the circumstances in which asylum applicants from abroad who had been removed would be entitled to advice from lawyers, how they would get it, whether the lawyers over here would be publicly funded to give advice to people abroad and whether they would be publicly funded to travel abroad to take instruction, talk to witnesses or talk to the appellant himself or herself. That is a narrow question, but it is important for those who give legal advice and help to know, when someone is certified and removed, what the scope is for providing, in a sense, a full legal service. I was told in a written answer by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), that the Legal Services Commission would authorise expenditure only in exceptional circumstances if an interview was absolutely necessary and there was no reasonable alternative such as communication by telephone, post, fax or video link. Sponsors, relatives or friends of a client based in the UK could also be used as a channel for instructions. Lawyers abroad could also be used as agents and paid out of public funds. Is the Minister saying that I could go back to the Czech Republic and consult a local lawyer in Prague who would then be paid by the Legal Services Commission? That is what seems to be suggested. In that case, what about the Legal Services Commission quality mark and standards?

These are not flippant questions but real ones. It will not be very long before, under these procedures, people become certified. When that happens, they will have to go abroad and make their appeal from there. It would be helpful for the House to have answers to some of these purely practical questions. If the Minister could write to me, a copy of the letter could be put in the Library. These questions are raised quite frequently with me by NGOs such as the Immigration Advisory Service, which I had the honour to found some 10 years ago. They could matter very much to people who might be affected by the Bill. I notice the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) nodding in agreement. I hope that means that I have not overstepped my mark in speaking from the Conservative Benches. I am sure that I have not. I pose these questions to the Minister because Members on both sides of the House are approaching the issue with humanity, fairness and decency.

In conclusion, we have no difficulty with what is proposed. We support the white list; we support the white list plus. I pay tribute to Lord Kingsland and to Baroness Anelay for the work that they and others have done in the other place. They found support and sympathy for many of their arguments from members all around their lordships' House. I hope that the Minister will accept our support for what she is doing. However, I hope that she will be prepared to say loud and clear that the Government will do everything as we would want it done to ensure that the system, which may be fast, is also patently and clearly fair.

Fiona Mactaggart: I have two issues of concern relating to certification connected with white-list countries and people who may lose their rights of appeal under clauses 82 and 84.

I raised the matter of certification in June and was reassured to some extent by the response of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who said that he wanted to ensure that the possibility of review was readily available. He continued:

> "We are keen to establish a pattern that will be checked by the judiciary on certification to provide us with a base on which to make common-sense decisions." —[*Official Report*, 11 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 802.]

I referred to Roma in an earlier intervention. I have had a number of cases presented to me by the Refugee Legal Centre and by Women Against Rape. I do not

[Fiona Mactaggart]

know the dates of all these cases, but most of them are of recent origin because in all cases—and the episodes complained about happened in countries including Poland, Latvia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia—there have been certificated appeals which, under the present law, can be appealed against. The applicants have appealed and have been granted asylum. In many cases, applicants have been subjected to rape and their assailants have colluded with state forces, including the police. That seems to be exactly the sort of pattern to which the Home Secretary referred. There is an issue about the way in which the power exists to mediate the exercise of the certification process. Were the Home Office to do that in the case of the Roma, I believe that much concern would be mitigated.

I am further concerned by the way in which clause 84(2)(c) is interpreted. Can the Minister give an assurance about its interpretation? Under this provision, if someone had had a right of appeal which they had not exercised, they could lose that right of appeal. At present, there is a way of testing that earlier before an adjudicator. Under this provision, someone can lose their right of appeal if they

"would have been permitted or required to raise on an appeal against another immigration decision in respect of which he chose not to exercise a right of appeal."

That would apply to someone who made an application, then made a fresh application and did not appeal against the refusal of their earlier application.

I understand why the Home Office has introduced this clause. Some people exercise their right of appeal in a flawed way and use that to get more rights of appeal. I am fundamentally in favour of only one right of appeal. The present arrangement whereby people can spin out many appeals is ineffective; it creates cynicism about the immigration and asylum appeals process and is wide open to abuse.

In some cases, however, people were not aware of their original right to appeal and I am concerned about them; for example, they might have moved—we all know how asylum seekers are pushed around the country—or they might have had a bad adviser. Some advisers are corrupt and cheating.

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Many of our constituents receive incompetent legal advice at the start of the process, so the damage has been done, however good their legal advice at the appeal stage. Justified cases are lost at appeal owing to the incompetence of earlier lawyers. People need the right of access to good-quality advice at the very beginning, but increasingly that does not happen.

Fiona Mactaggart: My hon. Friend makes a slightly different point, but he is right: we need to ensure that people have better access to advice. I hope that they can receive that advice in accommodation centres not only because they need it but because it helps the decision-making system to work well.

8.30 pm

Simon Hughes: The hon. Lady is an expert in this matter. I am sympathetic to her argument about a single appeal, but does she agree that an appeal cannot be exercised fully and properly if, in many cases, it is made from abroad? The appeal will have to take place in this country if we are to ensure that it is properly carried out, wherever it comes in the process.

Fiona Mactaggart: I agree, especially as regards people who, if they lost their appeal, could be removed to countries that are not even on the white list and where some groups are subject to the most grotesque violence. That is why I am concerned about these provisions.

At lunchtime today, I received a letter from a colleague of the Minister in response to questions that I had raised. The letter stated:

"Many of the people whose situations you describe should be making late appeals. The Home Office is bound to pass such appeals on to the adjudicator for an independent review of the timeliness issue and may in appropriate cases treat the appeal as in-time so that it proceeds directly."

I shall be overwhelmingly happy if the Minister assures me that the interpretation of paragraph (c) will always be that if people chose not to exercise their substantive right of appeal earlier, the Home Office will allow an adjudicator to determine whether the appeal should treated as out of time. People who had well founded fears but who did not exercise their appeal at an early stage could thus have their appeal considered.

Mr. Gerrard: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The critical point seems to be the immigration officer's leeway in deciding whether to certify the case. Perhaps some guidance could be produced, so that if there were failings on the part of the legal adviser that had nothing to do with the applicant, they could be taken into account when deciding whether to certify.

Fiona Mactaggart: In effect, that is what I am suggesting. The clause provides that one of the grounds for certification is that the substance of the appeal could have been raised at an earlier stage had the applicant chosen to do so. The decision about that issue of choice does not have to be dealt with in the Bill; in practice, it can be covered by instructions to immigration officers. However, the point is substantial. We need to ensure that the interpretation of the Bill is such that cases that ought to have a right of appeal can have that right. If the Minister can give us that assurance, the serious injustices to which the measure might give rise will not occur.

Simon Hughes: This debate is important. As the Minister and the Conservative spokesman observed, we debated the principle of a non-suspensive appeal that would have to take place outside the United Kingdom during earlier stages of the Bill, but there was never a white list proposal.

Like other colleagues, I remember debates on this issue when the Conservatives were in power and the Labour party was in opposition. The Labour party was very critical of the principle of a white list—the idea that one listed countries in advance with presumptions—and opposed it, as we do. I have not changed my view with the change of Government, and I know that some colleagues in the Labour party have not done so either.

I am not convinced that the argument that the Government have given their Back Benchers is terribly persuasive. A parliamentary Labour party briefing on the amendments came into my hands yesterday, as these things sometimes do. It poses this rhetorical question:

"Is this a White List just like the Tories"?"

It then gives an answer in an attempt to persuade Labour Members:

"The situation is quite different. We are living in a very different world now, where we are seeing large flows of asylum seekers from countries which are just about to join the EU and where there can be absolutely no doubt about their safety."

There is some truth in that, in the sense that there are new applicant countries to the European Union, but there are not many more asylum seekers. The number of those seeking asylum in western Europe has dropped by half over the past 10 years. So the argument for having a white list now, which was opposed by the Labour party only five years ago, is not borne out by the facts.

The Minister was right to say that some of the amendments tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends and me go to the heart of the principle of whether appeals should occur outside the country, and to the heart of the principle of a white list. That is because we are opposed to appeals abroad and we are opposed to a white list. We have not changed that view, so we shall try to amend the Bill to create the legislation that we wish it were.

For the record, I should like to list the Liberal Democrat amendments, as the Minister referred to the amendments generally, although that is not a criticism. We have tabled amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 154, amendments (a) to (f) to Lords amendment No. 157, amendments (a) and (b) to Lords amendment No. 179, amendments (a) and (b) to Lords amendment No. 184, amendments (a) to (d) to Lords amendment No. 188 and amendments (a) to (c) to Lords amendment No. 215. Some of them are parallel, in that they apply similarly to similar clauses. I shall not go through each in detail.

Mr. Letwin: Hallelujah!

Simon Hughes: I agree with that response, and I am sure others do too. The Minister is right that the amendments would omit in part from the purview of the Bill applications for human rights asylum as opposed to other bases of claim. As an alternative, they would not limit the category to serious-only cases, and would prevent the Government from adding other countries—one of the criticisms, this—to the list by secondary legislation.

Of course it is a good idea to have an advisory panel on country information, but it is less of a good idea if that panel does not have an obligation to give advice. There is the hint of a good thing without delivery of that good thing, as there is not as yet any obligation in the Bill to consult. That is also a matter that has been raised by the Joint Committee on Human Rights and others.

Jeremy Corbyn: One problem is that when a person is deported to, say, an EU applicant country and wishes to pursue an appeal, there is no individual monitoring of that person's circumstances—the degree of harassment that they might face from local official or unofficial forces, which object to the fact that the person has brought "shame" on their country by applying for asylum elsewhere. I believe that such people suffer considerable harassment as a result.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is right. One question that I want to ask the Minister—I hope that she will have a chance to reply in her winding-up speech—is: what tracking process will there be of people who return to the country from which they came? I do not think that many would find the following judgment flawed. The chance of someone being able fairly, without influence or disadvantage, to pursue an appeal in this country after having been sent home to the Czech Republic—to take the example of the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart)—without the authorities in that country becoming aware of the people or person being put at risk is very small. The fact is that most appeals will not happen once the individuals involved have gone abroad. For the Government, the blunt truth is that those appeals are not intended to happen—it is intended that a whole series of appeals will be lost. That is why I put my question to the hon. Member for Slough. It seems to me that we could come to a perfectly reasonable view on a single stage of appeal, but only if an appeal takes place—evidence shows how flawed initial decisions often are—and takes place in this country.

I have asked the Minister whether the monitor will be used to track people. My second question relating to the monitor is: what will the monitor monitor? The decisions are not adjudicator's decisions, which result in a decision; nor are they tribunal decisions, which result in a report. What will the monitor have? We are told that they will have a certificate, but will they have any more than that? Will they have the notes of the hearing? Will they independently take notes of the hearing? How can someone monitor whether the job has been done if they have no access to material on which to judge the initial decision? Proper scrutiny of a judicial or quasi-judicial process is not possible unless there is material to scrutinise.

Home Office Minister Lord Filkin, when asked in the other place whether the white list would be the subject of advice from the advisory panel—whether the panel was to be asked about the countries on the list, the countries to add and those to remove—said that he did not think so. What is the point in having an advisory panel on countries if it is not to be asked for its advice? The purpose of having an independent documentation centre—for which the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and others have argued—and an advisory panel is to have independent advice on, say, the state of play in the Czech Republic as it affects the Roma community.

Vera Baird: Is it not equally important to put into the legislation a positive obligation on the Secretary of State to have regard to that advice? Currently, it appears to me that the panel is merely one of a number of sources of advice to which he might have resort when refining his decisions, but there needs to be, first, a duty to advise and, secondly, a duty to have regard to the advice.

Simon Hughes: I agree absolutely. The Joint Committee on Human Rights, of which the hon. and learned Lady is a member, was highly critical of the Government's proposal. That Committee does an excellent job of examining new Bills, and it produced a second report on the amendments. Its members can speak for themselves, but the Committee was highly critical of the process envisaged and made it absolutely clear that it goes against the advice given by the United

[Simon Hughes]

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which says that a state-by-state presumption is invalid and cannot be justified. The Minister in the other place did not give the undertaking to which the hon. and learned Lady refers. Colleagues who advise us—the Immigration Advisory Service is based in my constituency—have specifically asked whether the advisory panel will be asked to advise, but we have received no such assurance.

The hon. Member for Slough gave lots of good examples—most drawn from the Refugee Legal Centre, which is an organisation with an excellent reputation that used to be based in my constituency but has now crossed the river—of people from each of the applicant countries who have suffered persecution and fled, and whose cases have been upheld. All the cases arose in recent years. Let me add one further case, which is relevant to more than just the issue of the white list of applicant countries.

My noble Friend Lord Avebury, who is a diligent champion on these matters, took up the case of Jaqueline Kunan, an asylum seeker from Ivory Coast. I believe that he described her circumstances when the Lords debated the Bill last week. I gather that her case was reported on "Woman's Hour" yesterday morning. She was in Harmondsworth from June, then detained in Dungavel, and then returned to Harmondsworth on 21 October. She has had three solicitors, one of whom, it appears, did not do a particularly good job. She has with her a baby who was born a year and a half ago, and I understand that she is again pregnant.

Jaqueline Kunan's claim is one that would normally be regarded as fundamentally unfounded, on the basis that the judgment given by the authorities was that she had not made out her case for asylum from Ivory Coast—a country where a military coup and takeover have occurred.

8.45 pm

In a couple of hours this week, my colleague Lord Avebury was able to substantiate independently the facts that the woman alleged, and in a way that made her case clear. With the assistance of the staff in my constituency office or other people, I have often asked for the facts to be checked, and we have been able to disprove the circumstances asserted against us. I do not yet have the confidence that the system will come to the rescue often enough of people in particularly vulnerable positions. The Minister accepted my point that 40 per cent. of the cases that were held to be manifestly unfounded had been overturned on appeal. When the Home Office did a spot check, it concluded that 85 per cent. of the decisions were satisfactory. By definition, 15 per cent. are not satisfactory, so 15 per cent. of—in that case—250 people, who may have had a terrible time, would be sent home, possibly to face persecution. We have a duty to deal with them.

I hope that hon. Members will be sympathetic to amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 154, if there is an opportunity for us to move it before the guillotine falls, or if not, that they will join us in voting against Lords amendment No. 157. That is a dangerous road to go down. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees has advised against it. It is a fair interpretation of the view of our Joint Committee on Human Rights to say that the Committee was very worried about it. We should not sign off the principle of people being sent abroad to appeal, or presume that certain countries will be satisfactory. Disproving that will often be far too difficult to achieve.

Vera Baird: I have little to add. I rely heavily on what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), who made most of the points that I had in mind. May I take the matter outside the white list arena for a short time? Suspended appeals were discussed in an earlier debate, but let us not forget that there will henceforward be a certificate from the Secretary of State that somebody's application, either on an asylum basis or on a human rights basis, is clearly unfounded. Such people will have no right to remain while making any kind of appeal, even if they do not come from an applicant country to the EU. There are all the hazards that my hon. Friend the Member for Slough set out in relation to people being returned to applicant countries in order for them to make their applications from there.

Ten or, as Opposition Members have said, 15 per cent. of people have cause for complaint and have succeeded on appeal, even from those countries. That is bad enough, but we will be sending people back to other countries on the basis that their claims are clearly unfounded. In addition, there will be no independent advisory service with any of the duties that would attach to such a service to tell the Home Secretary when a country is safe or not, and there will be no duty on him to have regard to any advisory service before making such decisions. The advisory service is an extra protection, but it comes into play only when the Home Secretary is considering whether to extend the white list.

In a sense, the white list people are somewhat better off. First, they have a 90 or 85 per cent. chance, because they are in a country that we regard as meriting application to the EU. Secondly, there will have been a screening process for that country through the independent advisory service, from which, I reiterate, it seems important to me that there should be a duty on the Home Secretary to accept advice, whereas people going outside the white list countries on the basis that their claims are clearly unfounded will have neither of those protections at all. They obviously will have no appeal in this country. They will have the prospect of judicial review, and I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister was able to reassure me that nobody who had a certificate judicially reviewed would be removed before the judicial review, whether allowed or not, had gone to a full hearing. I framed that question in connection with white list countries. Can my hon. Friend give me the same reassurance that people who are not from white list countries who want to appeal to the divisional court against their certificates will not be removed before the applications have been fully heard?

Beyond that reassurance, I seek a stronger reassurance, because a perusal of other aspects of the legislation seems to show that those who have been certified as clearly unfounded in their claim, even if they judicially review, whether or not they are going to a white country, will not be entitled to any asylum support while they wait for their case to be heard. Judicial review becomes a thin remedy indeed with no means of

sustenance and support while trying to implement it. Can my hon. Friend give me some assurance about what seems to be a lacuna in even the scant protection that the divisional court may be able to offer?

Simon Hughes: Is it the hon. and learned Lady's personal interpretation or that of her Committee that the proposals as amended appear to apply to people whether they are inside or outside the UK? That has been a controversial issue. Does she accept that the UNHCR evidence is clear that a presumption against a person can be effectively rebutted only if that person has a right of appeal and is based in the UK? That is important.

Vera Baird: I have made it clear that I do not speak on behalf of the Joint Committee in any of what I say. The Joint Committee raised the real difficulty that, on the face of the proposed legislation, the exclusion of the words

"a person within the United Kingdom"

seemed to mean that no one had a right of appeal anywhere. However, I took that point up with the Minister only recently, and I am now satisfied that a proper reading of the legislation leaves open that appeal from outside the country. I accept wholeheartedly what the hon. Gentleman says about the UNHCR and the need to rebut by having an appeal in the country. It is a thorny area for those who have a strong interest in human rights and ordinary decency.

It seems that there will be resort only to the independent monitor who will produce a report only to the Home Secretary and presumably not deal with individual claims. May I suggest that the independent monitor should instead be answerable to the Joint Committee on Human Rights on behalf of the House?

Beverley Hughes: In the four minutes remaining to me, I shall do my best to address the issues that hon. Members have raised, and any that I miss I shall deal with in writing.

The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) raised a number of issues and invited me to write to him. I shall write to him on the many questions that he asked about the details of the process and make the reply public. We are still working on some aspects, but it is important that hon. Members should have the information for which he asked and I shall set that out as clearly as I can.

I invite the hon. Gentleman, and any other hon. Member who would like to do so, to visit Oakington. Anyone who saw the process, the circumstances and conditions there might be reassured about the close attention to the issues of quality that we want to bring to bear on the process. For the record, the hon. Gentleman asked me about bilateral agreements, and it is important to remember that these clauses provide for two types of non-suspensive appeal. The first type, on which there has been most focus this evening, occurs where the Secretary of State certifies the claim to be clearly unfounded. In such cases, the person would be returned to their country of residence, so there would be no need for the bilateral agreement to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The second type of case occurs when we refuse a claim and consider that there is a safe third country. The person concerned can appeal against that refusal. Clearly, we would need bilateral agreements to make use of that process. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that no bilateral agreements with other countries have yet been signed, but we need the necessary legal powers to pave the way for them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) expressed concerns about a person who had understandable reasons for not appealing against a refusal, but is denied a right of appeal on making a subsequent application for asylum. Certainly, the powers to certify under clause 84 will be exercised on an individual basis. If a person could have appealed, but did not do so and then applied again, we would consider what reasons they had for not appealing. I cannot give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that the second application would be successful in avoiding certification. However, it would be judged on its merits and the reasons for not appealing in the first place would be taken into account, again on their merits.

I should like briefly to mention Lords amendment No. 215, to which a number of hon. Members have referred. The advisory panel is an important development. As I said, we will consult the panel about countries that we are considering adding to the list, but I say in response to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) that its job is to cover all countries from which asylum applications come.

It being five and a quarter hours after the commencement of proceedings, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Question agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 127 agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day], proceeded to put forthwith the remaining Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings to be concluded at that hour.*

Lords amendments Nos. 128 to 153 agreed to.

Clause 82

APPEAL FROM WITHIN UNITED KINGDOM: UNFOUNDED HUMAN RIGHTS OR ASYLUM CLAIM

Lords amendment: No. 154, in page 44, line 40, leave out from "70(1)" to end of line 42 and insert

"where the appellant has made an asylum claim or a human rights claim (or both)."

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 298, Noes 59.

Division No. 351] **[8:58 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick	Banks, Tony
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*	Barnes, Harry
Allen, Graham	Battle, John
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*	Bayley, Hugh
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary	Begg, Miss Anne
Atherton, Ms Candy	Bell, Stuart
Atkins, Charlotte	Benn, Hilary
Austin, John	Bennett, Andrew
Bailey, Adrian	Bepton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Baird, Vera	Berry, Roger
	Best, Harold

Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dan *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Gillian Merron

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Robert Smith and Tom Brake

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords Amendments Nos. 155 and 156 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 157.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Blunkett.]*

The House divided: Ayes 294, Noes 62.

Division No. 352] **[9:11 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris

Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Gillian Merron

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bennett, Andrew
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Mahon, Mrs. Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Robert Smith and Tom Brake

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 158 to 191 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 215 agreed to.

After clause 13

Lords amendment: No. 16, insert the following new Clause--

"Disapplication of section (*Consequential and incidental provision*) in relation to Part 1 shall not apply to this Part."

Beverley Hughes: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we will take Lords amendment No. 45 and Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 46 to 83, Lords amendments Nos. 85 and 87, Lords amendment No. 88 and Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 89 to 97, Lords amendment 98 and amendments (a) and (b) thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 100 to 103 and 110 to 125, Lords amendment No. 126 and Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendment No. 192 and Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 193 to 213, Lords amendment No. 214 and amendment (a) thereto, Lords amendment No. 216 and Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 217 to 223, Lords amendment No. 224 and Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendment No. 225 and Government amendment (a) thereto, and Lords amendments Nos. 226 to 236 and 238 to 311.

Beverley Hughes: These amendments refer primarily to the order-making power in Lords amendment No. 225. Most of what has been said about that amendment so far, both in the other place and outside, has been wrong, and much of it has been extremely misleading. We can only conjecture whether that was deliberate or not, but to put the matter beyond doubt we have altered the wording of the amendment. That may have been unnecessary, but the revision was not difficult.

Three issues were raised in the other place in relation to Lords amendment No. 225: timing, scope and what was described as menace. On timing, there is little more I can say other than that we are where we are. As I think we all know, the Bill has necessarily evolved,

particularly in recent months as we have reached agreement with France during changes in the asylum system. We have had to develop policy and reflect that in the Bill. It is important that, notwithstanding extra strains imposed on Members, we have managed to produce good legislation in which we respond to reality, albeit a changing reality.

The greatest misunderstanding has perhaps been on the scope of the Lords amendment. I ask the House to agree an amendment to clarify the scope of the power. I make it clear that it was always our view, based on parliamentary counsel's advice, that the power was narrow and limited.

The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has a formidable skill—I am not sure how long it will last or how soon he will be found out. He can talk utter rubbish and be totally wrong but because he has a soft seductive voice and seems like a nice person, he is believed, even by rather lazy journalists who do not do their research to find out the truth of the matter.

The right hon. Gentleman made two contentions on the "Today" programme about the Lords amendment—that the power would allow for changes to the Bill in future without recourse to a parliamentary debate, and that the power would enable the Home Secretary to change any previous laws. Both those contentions are completely and utterly incorrect. There would have to be a parliamentary debate and approval through an affirmative order if previous primary legislation were being changed, as is made clear in the Government's amendment. The right hon. Gentleman is being deliberately misleading or he has his facts wrong. He is such an assiduous person about detail that I cannot believe it is the latter.

The power would allow changes only to previous immigration laws that are consequential to this Bill to ensure coherence and consistency. That is good common sense and good drafting.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The hon. Lady said that the amendment would allow changes only to previous immigration legislation, but if she is good enough to look at subsection (2) of Lords amendment No. 225, she will see the words

"An order under this section may, in particular—

(a) amend an enactment".

That is any enactment. It is not confined to an immigration enactment. Indeed it goes on to say that the order may

"modify the effect of an enactment."

That clearly extends to statutory instruments made under any enactment. To say that the provision is confined to immigration legislation is not borne out in the statute.

Beverley Hughes: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman reads the first part of the Lords amendment, he will see that it says that

"The Secretary of State may by order make provision which he thinks necessary in consequence of or in connection with a provision of this Act."

Therefore, the enactment that can be amended or modified has to be consequential or incidental to the provisions of this particular legislation.

Mr. Hogg *indicated dissent.*

Beverley Hughes: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will have to put forward the advice that he has been given but that is the view of the parliamentary counsel who are assisting us.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): I am sorry to say this, but that is simply wrong. It is not a question of statutory interpretation. The provision enables an amendment to an enactment—any enactment. Is my hon. Friend prepared to say that it is inconceivable that it would lead, for example, to an amendment to a criminal justice Act, an education Act or anything else that is in any way incidental to these proceedings?

9.30 pm

Beverley Hughes: My hon. and learned Friend, despite his experience in this field, is simply incorrect. In order to be amended or modified, another enactment would, by definition, have to relate to the provisions in this Bill—in other words, to immigration—for it to be consequential or incidental. Those are the terms of the amendment.

The order-making power would not therefore allow the Government to make provision that was not purely consequential on, or incidental to, something already in the Bill. *[Interruption.]* To do so—as I suspect those hon. Members who keep jumping up and down know—would be ultra vires and unlawful.

Simon Hughes: Why was this provision introduced at the very last minute in the Lords? As the Minister knows, such provisions are always controversial and always looked at carefully. In keeping with the argument advanced by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), myself and others, why does the word "consequential" not have its normal meaning—something that happens after the Bill and which is related to it? The definition is very wide, and could include almost anything in the Bill, such as accommodation centres and appeal processes.

Beverley Hughes: I agree with the hon. Gentleman in that, had the position been different in terms of the Bill's development, I would have preferred to table the amendment earlier. However, there is a point about which we and parliamentary counsel cannot be clear. Although we think that all necessary cross-references with other legislation have been made—I shall deal with that point later in relation to a question that the right hon. Member for West Dorset asked me privately—we cannot be sure that all the other tidying-up work has been done to ensure that the Bill relates to previous legislation as written, without the need for amendment to make such cross-referencing absolutely clear and appropriate. As with much legislation, once the Bill has been enacted, there will be a need for a power that parliamentary counsel can bring forward, in the ways outlined in the amendment—and, so far as amendments

[Beverley Hughes]

to previous enactments are concerned, through the affirmative resolution procedure—to ensure that different Acts of Parliament are not in conflict with each other.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Can my hon. Friend help us some more on the meaning of the word "consequential"? If, as a consequence of the operation of this legislation, a weakness was revealed and a future Government wanted to introduce new elements of immigration or asylum law to cover it—such a situation would be the consequence of our failings in passing this legislation—would they be able to do so? In other words, through the amendment, could they pass what in effect would be new primary initiatives?

Beverley Hughes: I direct my hon. Friend to the wording of the amendment. He is perfectly capable of knowing what "consequential" means in these circumstances.

Mr. Fisher: I am asking my hon. Friend.

Beverley Hughes: Well, my hon. Friend knows what it means. It is a term that has been used in many clauses and much legislation, and I would have expected him to be familiar with it by now.

Mr. Fisher: Name one.

Beverley Hughes: I shall certainly name one. I want to get—

Mr. Fisher: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Beverley Hughes: No, I want to make some progress.

Mr. Fisher: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Beverley Hughes: I will not, because I want to make a further point.

Mr. Fisher: This is a debate.

Beverley Hughes: It is, and if, on listening to what I want to say, my hon. Friend wants to intervene, I will allow him to do so. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. While the hon. Lady is addressing the House, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Mr. Fisher) should be quiet.

Beverley Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The third issue that was raised in the other place was referred to as "menace", which I take to mean precedent. In other words, the amendment was regarded as setting a dangerous and menacing precedent in terms of the way in which business is done in this House. That is the issue that I wish to address tonight and I hope that I will answer some of the points that my hon. Friend has just made.

Clauses containing exactly the same words as the amendment should be familiar to the House. For example, the previous Administration, in the Local Government Finance Act 1992, produced a similar—if not more wide-ranging—clause to that before us tonight.

Mr. Letwin: Would the Minister read out that clause?

Beverley Hughes: Certainly. It states:

"The Secretary of State may at any time by order make such supplementary, incidental, consequential or transitional provision as appears to him to be necessary or expedient for the general purposes or any particular purposes of this Act or in consequence of any of its provisions or for giving full effect to it . . . An order under this section may in particular make provision for amending, repealing or revoking (with or without savings) any provision of an Act passed before or in the same session as this Act, or of an instrument made under an Act before the passing of this Act".

That is from 1992.

We have had examples of similar clauses in more recent legislation, such as the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 and the Education Act 2002. Only this week, we have had the Enterprise Bill, which included the following clause:

"Power to make consequential amendments etc . . . The Secretary of State may by order make such supplementary, incidental or consequential provision as he thinks appropriate . . . for the general purposes, or any particular purpose, of this Act; or . . . in consequence of any provision . . . An order under this section may . . . modify any Actor . . . may make incidental, supplementary, consequential, transitional, transitory or saving provision."

Only last night, we considered the Adoption and Children Bill, which contains the following clause:

"The appropriate Minister may by order make . . . any supplementary, incidental or consequential provision . . . any transitory, transitional or saving provision, which he considers necessary or expedient for the purposes of, in consequence of or for giving full effect to any provision of this Act . . . The power may be exercised so as to make . . . any supplementary, incidental or consequential provision".

That is no different from the provision before us. In fact, the advice given to me suggests that the power in the Adoption and Children Bill is drafted in wider terms than that before us tonight in Lords amendment No. 225. It allows a Minister to make supplementary provision, as well as consequential and incidental provision, that he thinks is

"necessary or expedient for the purposes of...giving full effect to any provision"—

of the Adoption and Children Bill.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said earlier that the House always pays great attention to such matters. However, I have looked through the *Hansard* for the Adoption and Children Bill, and in the debate last night not a squeak was heard about the supplementary and consequential provision in that Bill by anybody.

I wish to deal with a point raised privately with me by the right hon. Member for West Dorset about the scope of the Bill, so that I may put my reply on the record. He asked me whether the provision would allow us to rectify a direct conflict of law between the Bill and some previous legislation. I can tell him that it will: rectifying conflicts of law is a real priority for any Act. We hope that we have done most of that in the course of this Bill's passage through the House.

We may be left with a more common type of problem, involving consequential issues that are of lesser priority than correcting direct conflicts of law. For example, such cases might include references in other legislation that have been superseded by the Bill and which need to be substituted. Where there is no direct conflict, they might involve a possible lack of clarity if the statute book were not tidied up.

My officials have provided me with an example of a consequential amendment that we know we need to make. The power that we are discussing would enable us to make it, but we could not do so without it. Section 12 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 deals with the removal of asylum seekers to safe third countries, and refers to an appeal under section 65. However, the House will know that section 65 of the 1999 Act is being replaced by the appeal provisions in part 5 of this Bill. We will therefore use our consequential power to put that and similar inconsistencies right.

Hon. Members have claimed that the provision is far beyond the scope of any similar provision in any previous Bill. That is incorrect. The House considered a Bill last night that is wider in scope, and no one objected. As to the claim that the provision is without precedent, I hope that I have clarified that there are precedents in previous Tory legislation and in Bills that have been enacted in this and the previous Parliament. Moreover, the Bills that have come before the House in the past few days have all contained this provision.

I hope that I have reassured the House on the specific point about the provision. I am not sure why the matter gave rise to so much heat and so little light, or why people have been misled about the intention of the provision and about what it allows us to do. I do not like to talk of hypocrisy and fraud, but there has not been much enlightening comment from Opposition Members on this matter.

Mr. Letwin: I am not absolutely confident that the Minister has made her case in the best way to achieve a resolution of this matter. I find myself in genuine doubt. It is not the case that I sat in the bath tub to read the provision and imagine its meaning.

Mr. Blunkett: Or the shower.

Mr. Letwin: The Home Secretary helpfully suggests that I took a shower, but I did not even do that. I did not start this inquiry, which began in the House of Lords. I was present for that debate, to which a former Attorney-General, a Labour peer of great distinction, made a contribution, with commentaries being offered by leading counsel. I have consulted administrative lawyers. The Government Benches contain distinguished members of the legal profession. Behind me sits another silk, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), and my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) are both lawyers.

Lawyers surround us. Lawyers abound, and these lawyers read the words in the Bill as it used to be. There may have been recent precedents of almost identical wording—I do not know. I did not attend to the details of all aspects of the Adoption and Children Bill—we were rather preoccupied with one aspect, as the Minister may have noticed. I do not think that it is a defence of the original wording to assert that, in the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham, this is a serial offence. That does not help us one iota.

9.45 pm

The question here is what is the meaning of the original provision and, much more important, the amended provision. I may have been guilty of excessive generosity. I may have been mistaken. I thought this morning when we saw the Government amendment to the Lords amendment—rather late, I may say—that we had made huge progress. I thought that there was a difference between two statements—certainly there appears to be one in ordinary English. Lords amendment No. 225 states

"The Secretary of State may by order make provision which he thinks necessary"—

I take it that the phrase "he thinks necessary" then governs the latter part of the sentence—

"in consequence of or in connection with a provision of this Act."

That seems to suggest that the Secretary of State could deem what was necessary in consequence of or in connection with the provision of this legislation and having so deemed could amend without restriction any enactment.

There appears to this humble philosopher, and to a large number of lawyers whom this humble philosopher consulted, to be a difference between that and the more typical provision, which I have never liked—the Henry VIII clause is prevalent, as the Minister rightly says. There is a difference between the phrasing of Lords amendment No. 225 and the new phrasing suggested by the Home Secretary, which provides that the Secretary of State may by order make "consequential or incidental provision" in connection with the provision of this legislation. That seemed to remove or at least constrain the ability of the Secretary of State to judge whether something was consequential or incidental. It seemed to establish a category of thing that was genuinely consequential or incidental and to allow modification of an enactment only if such a modification were necessary as a matter of it being consequential or incidental. Let us hope that that is the case.

I was hoping that the Minister would give a learned reply to the next question raised across the Floor and that some jurisprudence would be put before us. I hoped that she would tell us not that parliamentary counsel—one set of lawyers among others—took a view but that there were cases that showed on judicial review the meaning to judges in English law of "consequential and incidental". I admit that our researches so far have not identified such cases. We may be fallible in this. I had hoped that the Minister would reveal that there was jurisprudence that made it clear to us—or ought to—that we were now in safe territory again and that we were talking about the very things—and I fully accept her intentions in this matter—that she listed.

If the sole purpose of the clause as currently phrased is to rectify a direct conflict of laws, to rectify minor discrepancies of reference and to clarify matters where

[Mr. Letwin]

a lack of clarity would otherwise prevail, it is of course harmless. The question is whether, as a matter of fact, it gives not to the present Secretary of State tomorrow but to some Secretary of State in future—establishing a precedent that will extend to a wider range of Secretaries of State in who knows which Administrations—the general ability to use what is, in effect, decree law subject to a 90-minute debate, to modify wild uncharted territory or enactments, or whether it simply provides for those Secretaries of State the ability to rectify discrepancies and conflicts of law. If the narrow interpretation prevails, I do not want to make a fuss about it—I see no reason to do so. If, however, the wider interpretation is correct, I see every reason on earth to make a fuss, because it is the fundamental principle of our parliamentary democracy that legislation should proceed through First Reading, Second Reading, Third Reading and a whole panoply of devices to ensure proper debate rather than 90 minutes' worth somewhere, stuck in a hole in the corner.

No doubt my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham and perhaps even some Liberal Democrat or Labour Members will accuse me of being too complacent, too lacking in doubt and scepticism.

Mr. Hogg: Too nice.

Mr. Letwin: Indeed. Tonight, however, I shall take it on trust that the Minister has behind her not her unpersuasive remarks but some genuine jurisprudence, some legal opinion that can be put before the House in rapid order, so that when the measure goes before the Lords tomorrow I can reassure my noble Friends that we have genuinely achieved a constrained and acceptable power. The matter is of some importance because the Bill could founder on it.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, despite his comments on the eloquence of my hon. Friend the Minister.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the narrow interpretation was correct. The answer is yes. We do not seek to introduce parent legislation by edict, fiat or anything else. The hon. Gentleman asked whether we would introduce jurisprudence. We shall certainly look for examples for the Lords debate tomorrow, but I cannot promise that we shall be debating jurisprudence in the Lords, rather than what is before us, on a narrow interpretation that mirrors exactly what has been done, including under the last Conservative Government—not least in the Local Government Act 1992.

Mr. Letwin: That is immensely helpful, not merely because of the Home Secretary's words but because he said them at the Dispatch Box. As I understand the implications of Pepper *v.* Hart, that will have some influence in determining how a court reads the provision.

Mr. Hogg: Although it is gratifying to hear the words of the Home Secretary, it is important to keep in mind that he can bind only his own Government. He cannot bind his successors. We are thus thrown back on the language of the clause and the amendment.

Mr. Letwin: I accept my right hon. and learned Friend's point: the Home Secretary cannot bind anybody but himself. Indeed, the history of his relationship with his predecessor as Home Secretary amply indicates that one Home Secretary does not bind the next. However, I think that my right hon. and learned Friend will agree that the courts are likely to look at what the Home Secretary has just said when they interpret the statute, so the right hon. Gentleman's comments were most helpful. Let us hope, moreover—

Mr. Hogg: The Home Secretary did not give an interpretation, only a statement of his intent—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Letwin: As I understand the matter, under the Pepper *v.* Hart doctrine, for a Minister—especially the Home Secretary in a measure that he has sponsored—to make a statement of his intent is to give something close to an interpretation, or something that has some force as an interpretation. However, I shall leave that point as we are in the hands of great legal experts on both sides of the House—I am not among them.

Let us hope that the point will be proved beyond doubt when the Home Secretary's gallant offer to produce some jurisprudential material is put before the House of Lords tomorrow.

Mr. Fisher: Like the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), I was considerably reassured to hear the Home Secretary say that it was not his intention to interpret the provision as the hon. Gentleman suggested. Hon. Members on both sides of the House welcome that. However, the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) related not only to future Governments, but also to what is possible under the Bill.

The fact that the Home Secretary has given his word about his intentions and about what he will not do is extremely welcome and reassuring, but it does not change the fact that another interpretation of the Bill would be possible. I should be grateful if the Home Secretary or the Minister would answer the genuine question that I put earlier. That was not about whether the provision was useful in rectifying or clarifying, but about whether it could be used to add to the Bill. That is a crucial element.

My question was genuine, although the Minister seemed to think that I was trying to be clever and already knew the answer. Perhaps I am naive, but I do not know the answer. If weaknesses in the Bill are revealed later, does the word "consequential"—a consequence being a failing in the Bill—allow the present Home Secretary or a future Home Secretary to introduce completely new initiatives? They might shore up the measure—perhaps desirably so—but that is not the interpretation that either the Home Secretary or the Minister are trying to put on the matter. There is an enormous difference between the two interpretations and I genuinely seek an answer.

Beverley Hughes: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. The power would not allow

either this Home Secretary, or indeed any future Home Secretary, to introduce a new provision of the kind that he has described. The words that the Home Secretary has uttered from the Dispatch Box apply not only to him but to any future Home Secretary.

Mr. Fisher: I am grateful for that clarification and reassurance. I suspect that that was heard on both sides of the House and I hope that other hon. Members will be reassured by it.

This exchange has been very useful because this practice is becoming far too common. The Minister referred to examples going back to 1992. Both Governments over the past 10 years have been guilty of using such provision. Too many pieces of legislation have opened doors. It is one thing, in the words my hon. Friend used in citing the Adoption and Children Bill, to give full effect to a provision. Of course, when that is so, the phrase "consequential and incidental" makes absolute sense. Every piece of legislation needs interpretation at the edge, but that is very different from opening a door in order to add substantively to the initiatives taken in a Bill. If the Minister and the Home Secretary say that "consequential" cannot be interpreted in such a way under this legislation, I shall be satisfied, relieved and happy. However, I remain worried; it will be interesting to see the matter considered at greater length.

Simon Hughes: I am conscious that we are on the last lap: we have considered 311 amendments in six and a quarter hours; 20 Government amendments were tabled late last night; and the Government also wanted us to overthrow 22 Lords amendments today. In this last group, there are three important matters, but we shall hardly be able to touch on two of them.

There is a significant issue in Lords amendment No. 98, which changes the law retrospectively. Had we the time, we would have moved our amendment to omit the retrospective nature of the provision, but in the absence of that I ask the House to vote against the Lords amendment because of that fundamental breach of principle.

There is a significant issue to do with the extension of powers outside the United Kingdom. Let us consider that we have immigration control at Sangatte, for example. We have argued that the same rights should apply to people whose asylum cases are processed there as they do in the UK. We therefore ask Members to refuse to assent to the proposed provision.

The final issue that has occupied us is the amendment to the so-called Henry VIII clause. Both the Minister and the Home Secretary have given reassurance on the point, but the amendment should not have been tabled at the last moment and only in the Lords. Even as amended, we are not satisfied that the provision will not allow some risk of further major legislation. I therefore hope that the House will stand up against anything that allows the Government to take power for the Executive that has not been expressly authorised by Parliament.

This Bill is full of new Executive powers. It takes away rights of appeal; it does not allow some people to appeal in this country; it leaves to Ministers decisions that were previously taken by the courts. On the Liberal Democrat Benches, we have tried for months in both Houses to resist such proposals. We have put up a good fight in the other place and the Lords have done a very good job. As a commentator in the press made clear today, our job is to stand up to such Government usurpation of power. We shall do so, and I hope that colleagues join us in the Lobby when we have our last opportunity to vote against what are several steps too far and several powers too many in dealing with some of the most vulnerable in our society.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Lords amendment disagreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 225, before clause 137, to insert the following new clause—*Consequential and incidental provision.*

Amendment made to the Lords amendment: (a), leave out

'provision which he thinks necessary in consequence of or'

and insert 'consequential or incidental provision'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment, as amended.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 301, Noes 62.

Division No. 353] **[10:00 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet

Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Charlotte Atkins and Mr. Jim Murphy

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hogg, rh Douglas
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stunell, Andrew

Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Robert Smith and
Tom Brake

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 45, 88, 126, 192, 216 and 224 disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in their remaining amendments.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 299, Noes 57.

Division No. 354] **[10:16 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*

Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and Charlotte Atkins

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hogg, rh Douglas
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Robert Smith and John Thurso

Question accordingly agreed to.

Remaining Lords amendments agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Mr. Barry Gardiner, Mr. John Heppell, Beverley Hughes, Mr. Humfrey Malins, and Mr. Desmond Swayne; Beverley Hughes to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Enterprise Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

Enterprise Bill

Lords Reasons for insisting on amendments to which the Commons have disagreed, considered.

10.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I beg to move, That this House insists on disagreeing with Lords Reasons 1C and 176C to 186C.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu thereof.

Miss Johnson: We have always been clear that the Bill allowed the Office of Fair Trading to create a separate post of chief executive if it wanted to do so. Last week I reassured the House that I envisage reviewing the arrangements at the top of the OFT when John Vickers retires in 2005, so we would consider at that time whether a separation of the roles of chairman and chief executive was desirable. However, given the concerns expressed that the OFT should definitely have a chief executive, the amendment that I have tabled in lieu of the Lords amendment makes express provision for such a post in the Bill.

The amendment also provides for a transitional period of two years during which a combined chairman and chief executive at the OFT could be appointed. Hon. Members will know that the OFT's particular circumstances have been critical to our decision not to separate the roles of chairman and chief executive between two different people at present. We are conscious that the OFT is about to enter a period of substantial change as a result of the Bill, and we want to ensure that there is continuity to lead the OFT through that change.

We have already said that the Secretary of State will appoint John Vickers as chairman of the OFT for the remainder of his current term as Director General of Fair Trading, honouring the commitment made to him when he was appointed to that post. Given that commitment, and to provide the desired continuity while the OFT's new arrangements bed down, I remain of the view that the OFT should not separate the roles of chairman and chief executive immediately. The transitional provision will ensure that the commitments given to John Vickers are honoured, and it will assist the OFT.

I [illegible] hon. Members that in creating this new statutory authority the Bill is providing for a significant depersonalisation of competition and consumer regulation, and I have said before that I expect the OFT to have a majority of non-executive members. A two-year transition during which a combined chairman and chief executive may be appointed therefore seems to me to be sensible and apt.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): We return to this amendment, which we discussed only last Wednesday. This Bill has been a bit of a marathon, although I have not been involved with it for very long. This may, of course, be the last time that we discuss it in this House. The Bill has had nearly 750 amendments, largely from the Government, and nine new clauses. That is no way to prepare legislation. It was badly thought out and badly prepared. There is confusion in the mind of the Government, as demonstrated by this amendment, and a lack of direction on their part.

We have many reservations remaining but we think that the Bill is now, in part, sensible and useful. It deals largely with competition, insolvency and consumer protection, not with enterprise. This is a Government who stifle enterprise, wrapping business in red tape and regulation. They do not understand enterprise or business, and their Back Benches are largely populated by those who have made a career of opposing free enterprise.

Amendment No. 1 shows the confusion in the Government's mind. The Cadbury report says:

"The chairman's role in securing good corporate governance is crucial. Chairmen are primarily responsible for the working of the board, for its balance of membership ... Given the importance and particular nature of the chairman's role, it should in principle be separate from that of the chief executive."

The principle is what we are talking about. The report continues:

"If the two roles are combined in one person, it represents a considerable concentration of power."

The 1995 Hampel report said:

"Our view is that, other things being equal, the roles of chairman and chief executive officer are better kept separate, in reality as well as in name. Where the roles are combined, the onus should be on the board to explain and justify the fact."

More recently, the Minister said that the Director General of Fair Trading

"currently has a wide range of functions in the areas of competition and consumer protection, many of which are being reformed in the Bill. The Government believe that in the light of the reforms, it is no longer appropriate for all those powers to be vested in one individual."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 16 April 2002; c. 12.]

Even more recently, last Wednesday the Minister referred to Sir John Vickers, "who I expect to occupy both roles in future." In response to an intervention, she said that the question of how the role would be divided was largely academic. The next day, I read *Hansard* and found that the reference to "both roles" had been expunged. I am not by nature a conspiracy theorist, but I was concerned that an official from the Department of Trade and Industry had ensured that the reference to "both roles" had been taken out of *Hansard*. I raised a point of order about that on Thursday. Having spoken to the Editor of *Hansard* and to his Deputy, I am happy to accept that it was an error rather than anything suspicious. Nevertheless, there is some confusion.

If we want companies to be run in a certain way, I suggest that the Government body that regulates and looks after them should be run in the same way. The chief executive considers the detail and the day-to-day operations, and the chairman oversees the strategy and provides the checks and balances on the chief executive. In the debate last Wednesday, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), like many others, asked who regulates the regulator. That is an important question, because he will be extremely powerful. The OFT post will have a tremendous impact on business and on the enterprise of this country.

A report produced by the Strategy Unit in September entitled "Private Action, Public Benefit" is about the Charity Commission but it can be applied to the same position in the Office of Fair Trading. It says:

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

"The Chief Commissioner is currently both Chair and Chief Executive of the Commission ... With the ... higher public profile that the Commission is to adopt, there is a strong case for introducing separate Chair and Chief Executive posts. The Chair's particular role would be in ensuring good corporate governance and the smooth functioning of the enlarged board, and in representing the Commission in public and at high level within Government and the charitable sector."

If I am allowed to quote Lord Razzall—

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): Lord Razzall is a Liberal Democrat.

Mr. Robathan: He is indeed a Liberal Democrat. I do not often quote Liberal Democrats or pray them in aid, however yesterday in the House of Lords he used the analogy of the BBC, and I think that it is a rather good one. It is also a public body. We may have our own views on the BBC, but would we want Greg Dyke to be both chairman and chief executive? I suggest that almost all hon. Members would answer no to that question.

Sir John Vickers is an excellent man. Not only did he go to my college at Oxford, Oriel, but he was a fellow of All Souls, as we were reminded last Wednesday by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). I am sure that the Government will heartily deny the comments in an article in last Sunday's edition of *The Sunday Telegraph*, which says:

"The Government is heading for further embarrassment over sweeping powers to be given to the overhauled Office of Fair Trading, after it emerged that John Vickers, the designated chairman and chief executive, is willing to give up one of these roles. ... an OFT spokesman confirmed that Vickers is 'neutral' on whether the roles should be split, adding: 'The decision is for Patricia Hewitt"—

the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—

"and Parliament.' ... The Government's supporters say that best practice in a private sector boardroom is not necessarily applicable to that of a regulator."

I think that, on principle, it would be helpful if it were dealt with by the regulator as well.

I am sure that Sir John Vickers will do the job well, but confusion continues because, having denied our argument until last night, the Government have now largely accepted it. After Sir John Vickers there will be a chief executive and a chairman, separate and distinct.

The Government have accepted our argument. I think that it is much better for good corporate government, and for the oversight of good corporate government by the OFT, for there to be two separate roles and two separate occupants of the posts involved.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I do not want to make a meal of this, because many of the arguments about the split functions of the chief executive and the chairman were aired the other day, and I understand that the Government amendments largely cover the principle for which we argued—that the roles should be separated. I accept that that considerable step has now been taken, and I do not see much purpose in prolonging the debate indefinitely.

It is unfortunate that the Government prejudged the legislation, and that we are now having to build legislation around one individual's contract, but that is a fact of life. There was a contract, which had to be honoured. I understand that the Government have now largely accepted that the legislation will have to be changed, and in the way that we have sought.

I will say, however, that throughout our discussion of accountability I have been concerned with a slightly different point: the extent to which the key appointment of the chief executive will be subject to effective parliamentary scrutiny. Lord Borrie, who performed that role in the past, tried to address the issue when it was debated in the House of Lords. He gave a long list of ways in which he felt that this powerful appointment was accountable to Parliament. He listed the parliamentary ombudsman, the report to the Public Accounts Committee, the Competition Commission and the competition appeals tribunal, and asked rather wearily why on earth we needed more parliamentary accountability when all those bodies were available.

Although obviously a distinguished man, Lord Borrie may not have quite got the point that has concerned many of us. The key issue is the process of appointment. Mr. John Vickers—I do not want to be pedantic, but I must tell the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) that I do not think he has reached the knighthood stage yet—is clearly an outstanding individual, but if a future Government appointed a complete dud or made a blatantly political appointment, at what point could the House exercise some control or scrutiny?

This is not an issue that could be taken to the ombudsman, to the Competition Commission—another quango—or to one of the courts. Scrutiny can only be exerted here. That is why I, along with other Members, have urged that when an appointment is made, Mr. Vickers's successor should be brought before the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. We do not need to legislate for that; all we need is some assurance from the Secretary of State, for reasons of courtesy as much as anything else, that the appointment will be referred to Parliament for scrutiny. I am not saying that Parliament should necessarily be able to veto the appointment, but I think it should be referred to a Select Committee for proper oversight.

I am disappointed that that relatively small concession to parliamentary scrutiny has not been made, and I hope the Minister will make it. I do not think it necessarily affects our attitude to the amendment: it is couched in terms of the split functions, and that point has been conceded. But I would like to leave the Bill feeling that the Government had taken account of the concern about the considerable power vested in this appointment, and the view that it should be subject to more scrutiny.

10.45 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I cannot agree that the roles of chairman and CE can be sensibly combined for any period. That is organisational nonsense. It would not pass even key stage 1 in management philosophy.

I do not want to be a killjoy, but such confusion on the part of the Government should not be allowed to pass unmentioned. I am pleased that the Government have caved in on the amendment, but I cannot see why the transitional period should be set at two years. I had hoped for a more detailed explanation of that from the Minister. Perhaps there is still time for her to cover those

points. Why is it two years? Why not one year, six months or even two months? We need to ask those questions.

If the structure of the OFT is not right, how can it do its important job in our economy? The answer is that it probably cannot. I like the idea of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) that a new appointment should at least, out of courtesy, be scrutinised by the Select Committee. I hope that those on the Treasury Front Bench will take that on board.

I will not delay proceedings further but I thought that those points should be raised.

Miss Melanie Johnson: I reiterate the fact that we have always accepted that a split could be made: the Bill always made it possible for the two roles to be split. However, we have always said that we wished to honour an existing appointment. In response to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), the reason why we have gone for two years is that John Vickers retires in 2005. In fact, it will make little difference because the amendment relates to a process of appointment, not to any existing post holder. However, it is clear that, within two years, there will be a change at the top of the OFT. That change is recognised in the transitional period in the amendment.

On the role of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry or indeed any other Select Committee, we are enthusiasts—I am sure that the OFT is—for parliamentary accountability, for seeing that that accountability is exercised fully, and for members of Select Committees taking an interest directly in the work of the OFT in its many guises. I trust that that work will go on. It is unlikely that we would want to go down the path that the hon. Member for Twickenham mentioned. In any event, as he rightly said, the amendment is concerned not with that issue directly but with ensuring that, after the honouring of the two-year period, the two jobs of chairman and chief executive will be split. I gave the House an assurance that we would look at that matter. This is a more formalised arrangement to reassure this House and another place. I trust that Members will receive it in the spirit in which it is offered.

Question put and agreed to.

Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu of Lords reasons agreed to.

Miss Johnson: I beg to move, That this House does not insist on its amendment 2A to Lords amendment No. 2 to which the Lords have disagreed, but instead agrees with amendment (a) in lieu thereof.

As I said in last week's debate on Lords amendments, I am happy to accept the principle of Lords amendment No. 2—that the Office of Fair Trading should have regard to the generally accepted principles of good corporate governance in its affairs. However, I consider it necessary to amend the Lords amendment to ensure that the OFT must have regard only to the principles of good corporate governance that may reasonably be regarded as being applicable to it, and to ensure that the OFT must also have regard to other relevant general guidance concerning the governance of public bodies.

As hon. Members will know, we tabled an amendment last week, modelled on a similar provision in the Office of Communications Act 2002, to achieve these changes. However, we have listened to the strong opinions in the other place, which favoured an amendment modelled on the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. Today's amendment is therefore based on the 2000 Act, which includes a provision that refers to having regard to the principles of corporate governance, which may be reasonably regarded as applicable to "the Authority". Obviously, our draft refers instead to the OFT. We have added to that model a reference to having regard to guidance that is aimed at public bodies. This is an important change. The OFT will not be a company, so it must take proper account of guidance, rules and procedures for public bodies, such as Treasury rules on public accounting.

By way of contrast, the Financial Services Authority is a private law body—a company limited by guarantee, on which statutory functions are conferred. The provision in the 2000 Act therefore needs amending to be fully appropriate to the OFT. I believe that amendment (a) achieves the Lords' underlying aim—that the OFT should have regard to the principles of good corporate governance—with a provision that is modelled on the 2000 Act. We have changed the provision only where necessary to ensure that it is fully appropriate to the OFT.

Mr. Robathan: It is interesting to note that yesterday in the Lords, at the early hour of 6.41 pm, long before dinner, the Government could summon only 129 people in support of their position—seven fewer than they managed some 20 minutes earlier for the first amendment. I am not sure whether wiser and more learned counsel prevailed—

Miss Johnson: Given today's circumstances, would it not be wiser for Opposition Members to refrain from mentioning support that can be achieved in furtherance of particular aims or objectives?

Mr. Robathan: I am sorry, but I was discussing the matter in hand—amendment No. 2 to the Bill—rather than making cheap and foolish comments about the Opposition.

Bob Spink: Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend by suggesting that the Government's lack of support in another place was due to the contradictory nature of these amendments. According to any management textbook, the principles of good corporate governance generally require the splitting of the roles of chief executive officer and chairman. How does the Minister square that with her amendment?

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Government are in confusion over this issue, which is why the Minister tried to deflect my observation with a rather foolish comment that had nothing to do with the matter in hand. However, our exchange must have been in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker; otherwise, you would have pulled me, or her, up. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may jest, but we are talking about corporate governance, a very serious matter in the light of Enron and of other scandals in the United States.

What I and most other Opposition Members do not understand is why the Government exhibit such antipathy towards good corporate governance. Lords amendment No. 2, which was passed last night, states:

[Mr. Robathan]

"In managing its affairs the OFT must have regard to the generally accepted principles of good corporate governance."

I would not have thought that there was anything even slightly controversial about that, not even to Labour Back Benchers who have not followed proceedings on the Bill.

As the Minister has pointed out, the exact words of the amendment were taken from the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, which instructed the Financial Services Authority to

"have regard to the generally accepted principles of good corporate governance."

The Minister has just told us that the FSA is a company, but is it a business? Does it make profits? I think not. I am amazed that the Government object to Lords amendment No. 2.

Good corporate governance is the cry of the moment, especially on the Labour Back Benches. A ten-minute Bill was introduced by the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) on 15 October, entitled "Corporate Responsibility". A Government White Paper on company law—which I am sure has been read by all hon. Members—was published in July. It is called "Modernising Company Law". It is a detailed document, but I shall cite only one example. It states:

"we are also taking a number of other initiatives to promote improved corporate governance, such as . . . the work undertaken in the wake of the collapse of Enron".

That is a DTI document with a foreword by the Secretary of State, so I question whether we are seeing joined-up Government.

The Government's amendment appears to have been produced in a fit of pique. It dilutes the provision, although less so than the amendment they produced last week. It sends the message that good corporate governance is necessary for everybody except the regulator or a Government body. We can all make our own judgment about why the Government are so unhappy with the totally innocuous wording of Lords amendment No. 2. However, I know that discussions have taken place in the other place, and the Government have their huge and somewhat mindless majority here, so I will not press the issue to a vote.

The Bill has been hugely improved by close scrutiny in both Houses, but especially in the Lords. The scrutiny of the Bill has forced the Government to think about what they are doing and to defend their case, however badly. I came to the Bill a little late in the day—

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): It shows.

Mr. Robathan: From my reading of *Hansard*, I do not recall that the hon. Gentleman took much part in the debate. I was astonished to read that the Bill has had nearly 750 amendments.

Mr. McWalter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman was on the Committee, so I will of course give way.

Mr. McWalter: I wished to point out to the hon. Gentleman that I was on the Committee and made several telling contributions. I have been watching the Bill's progress with a sense of paternal joy at the liberation of enterprise that it will involve.

Mr. Robathan: I am always pleased to give way to my old bridge partner, and I knew that he served on the Committee. It was not he who made the sedentary intervention, as he knows.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robathan: No, because I am about to finish my speech.

Mr. Borrow: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate for the Opposition spokesman to name me as having made a sedentary intervention when I made no such remark?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I do not recall that the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) named any hon. Member. As for interventions, who Members give way to is entirely a matter for them.

11 pm

Mr. Robathan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall certainly not bother giving way again.

Before I sit down, I have to correct myself, as the hon. Member for Twickenham was right. Professor John Vickers has yet to be made Sir John Vickers. However, I am almost certain that I have heard him referred to before as Sir John, and I am sure that it is only a matter of time before the honour arrives in his post.

I hope that the Bill does the good that is intended. We wish it well, with reservations. We shall not press the matter to a vote.

Dr. Cable: I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). The original amendment was tabled in the Lords for two reasons. The first was to reinforce the argument for splitting the roles of chairman and chief executive, but that point has now been conceded and does not need pursuing.

The second reason was touched on the by the hon. Member for Blaby, and is a bit more mysterious. The Financial Services Bill that recently went through the House contained a very simple phrase and description, but the Government feel, for some reason, that it is necessary to change it radically. I do not understand that.

The language that has been inserted in the Bill about the appropriate roles of public bodies is equally applicable to the FSA. I do not understand the logic of the Minister's argument. She says that the amendment is necessary because the OFT is a different sort of body, but there is nothing in the change that relates to the difference between the OFT and the FSA.

I think that what has happened is that the FSA was allowed to get away with a commitment to corporate governance, but that the civil servants decided that the formulation did not build in enough of the public service

culture. They did not want another quango to get away with the same thing, so they decided to toughen up the language.

It is not worth pursuing the point through ping-ponging between the two Houses, but the amendment does seem to be an example of retrospective tidying up rather than an issue of principle for which the Government are fighting. However, I have no intention of pursuing the matter further.

Miss Melanie Johnson: I shall clarify the differences between the OFT and the FSA in this respect. There are a couple of crucial differences, and the first is that the OFT is publicly funded, whereas the FSA is not. Effectively, it is funded by a levy on industry. Therefore, although it may comply with them, the FSA does not have the same obligations as the OFT to take proper account of the guidance rules and procedures for public bodies. An example of that guidance would be the Treasury rules on public accounting.

The existence of those differences is why we have been careful to make sure that an explicit formulation in this respect—and I believe that the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) will appreciate this—will pick up the notions of good governance, appropriately adapted from a private-sector context for the explicit public-sector responsibilities of the OFT.

Bob Spink: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Johnson: I shall allow the hon. Gentleman a second on his feet.

Bob Spink: Will the Minister name one industry in which the combination of the roles of chief executive officer and chairman in one person is accepted as good governance?

Miss Johnson: My point was that the OFT is not a private company involved in industry. It is a public body, publicly funded to discharge public functions, and it is therefore different from the bodies to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Bob Spink: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Johnson: No. We are dealing with a basic point about corporate good governance. My understanding is that hon. Members of all parties accept that corporate good governance is an important concept, whose furtherance we all support. Indeed, I was grateful that the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) remarked upon the White Paper on company law review which I launched in July. There is a considerable amount of other work being done on good governance in the business sector, and it is important that we recognise its value.

We are simply trying to recognise both the proposals that were put forward in another place to recognise the formulation used in the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 which, of course, I am only too happy to replicate. I want to modify those appropriately to reflect the OFT's public role. Having explained that, I hope that the House will feel able to support amendment (a).

Question put and agreed to.

Amendment made: (a) to Lords amendment No. 2 in lieu of amendment 2A.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We now come to motions 5, 6 and 7, which, for the convenience of the House, we will take together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft Maternity and Parental Leave (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 24th October, be approved

That the draft Paternity and Adoption Leave Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 24th October, be approved

That the draft Statutory Paternity Pay and Statutory Adoption Pay (Weekly Rates) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 24th October, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 28th October, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Fireworks

11.7 pm

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): I am delighted, on this bonfire night, to present a petition calling for an urgent review of existing legislation of fireworks, which was signed by 220 of my constituents in the constituency of Gloucester.

The petition declares that the existing legislation on fireworks is in need of urgent review.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to bring forward legislative proposals to require all public firework displays to be controlled by licensed pyrotechnicians; to license all vendors of fireworks to meet strict safety criteria, and to restrict the times of year at which fireworks can be bought.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Consumers for Health Choice

11.8 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I wish to present a petition on behalf of some 280 of my constituents, who are very concerned about the implications of the European food supplements directive and the proposed European directive on traditional herbal medicinal products, particularly as these could materially infringe on their right to choose safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies in future.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Fireworks

11.9 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): On this anniversary of a famous event that took place somewhere near this Chamber a few hundred years ago, I wish to present a petition from 793 residents of Lowestoft in my constituency who are concerned about the nuisance and danger caused to people and animals by those who misuse fireworks; and by the spread of this practice way beyond the short period of time around 5 November to the extent that it constitutes antisocial behaviour.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons enacts legislation which would make it an offence to sell fireworks to individuals for private use at times other than the three weeks leading up to 5 November each year.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Maajid Nawaz

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

11.10 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): Tonight, Maajid Nawaz lies incarcerated in a prison in Egypt. He was arrested in April and accused of belonging to the Islamic liberation movement. He is a 24-year-old married man with a child aged two. His mother, Mrs. Nawaz, my constituent, saw me at the beginning of her son's imprisonment to share with me her agony at the way that he is being treated.

When Mrs. Nawaz came to see me at my surgery last Friday, she was even more distressed, because she had not been prepared for what she saw in Egypt when her son's trial began. He was brought into the courtroom in a cage, along with 25 other men. During the proceedings, incredibly—it is not common practice in British courts—drinks, ice cream and other things were sold, as if the trial were a trivial matter.

During the trial, it transpired that there was no proper translation of the evidence; indeed, the evidence did not seem to be correctly presented. The trial is adjourned at present because of Ramadan, but I hope that as a result of the debate the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) will do his best to ensure that justice is done. I know, too, that constituents of other Members currently in the Chamber are similarly affected.

I want to make it clear that I do not want to criticise the actions of Ministers in this matter. Baroness Amos has done everything that she possibly can to secure justice for those in prison. The Foreign Secretary has done what he can. However, for whatever reason, the Government's protestations have not been entirely heeded.

Maajid's arrest took place at 3 am on 1 April. It was a frightening experience. The arresting officers and soldiers had no warrant. They claimed that, as it was their country, they did not need one. I have evidence about what took place.

Maajid was taken from his house at gunpoint. He claims that the security forces were brandishing semi-automatic machine guns, grenades and various bombs. The experience was extremely frightening. Dozens of soldiers were in attendance. It appears that there was overuse of violence, even though unarmed men were being arrested.

Maajid's wife was told that he would be back in two days. That was in April. The phone cable was removed, leaving Maajid's wife, who has no command of the Egyptian language, alone in a foreign country with no means of communication with the outside world. Maajid was taken to a cell where he was blindfolded and handcuffed. He was quizzed about his ethnic origin and left to sleep on a concrete floor. At no stage were the families of the men informed why they had been arrested.

Between 1 and 4 April, Maajid and the other men were held in a jail in Cairo. The House would not benefit from hearing lurid details of the torture that went on, but Maajid was forced to listen to people being tortured

by electricity. He was threatened, blindfolded, tied up with rope and deprived of sleep. His hands were tied behind his back. He had to share a blanket with another person, even though it was not big enough to keep either of them warm. When eating meals, his hands were tied together in front of him. The meals were simply bread and cheese. Maajid was often treated badly. I know that it is a complaint sometimes about British jails, but the toilet facilities were beyond belief.

From 4 April, Maajid was transferred to another prison. He was forced to make statements while still in a state of shock. Increasingly, he was deprived of any sleep whatever. That went on for a month and a half, as Maajid and his colleagues obviously became more and more demoralised. They were denied access to beds, lights and other such facilities. They were revisited by the torturers from state security and tortured again while blindfolded. There were no mattresses; the men were again left to lie on a concrete floor in the dark. While all that was going on, is it surprising that some style of confessions were extracted under torture?

The general complaint—of which I know the Minister is aware—is that Maajid and others feel that they were denied access to the British consul for roughly a week, and to lawyers for a month and a half. Gordon Brown, the head of the consulate in Cairo, has been given all this evidence and is acting on it.

Maajid, his mother and the legal team believe that the Egyptian Government have broken the Vienna convention on consular relations by not informing the consul of the arrests until 10 days after they took place. The United Nations convention against torture has also been infringed by a failure to investigate the claims straight away and by not responding to an official complaint lodged by the United Kingdom consulate. Egyptian law and human rights law have also been infringed by denying the men access to lawyers for one and a half months despite attempts by the consulate to gain such access.

Added to that, people can be held under emergency law only if they are thought to be drug dealers or terrorists, yet on 24 June, the terrorist charges were dropped and the men were instead charged with being members of a banned party. Suspects can only be held under emergency law for a maximum of 30 days, yet they were held under that law for two months and 24 days—another breach of the conventions.

The solicitors assisting Maajid and others, Christian Fisher Khan, said that the charges are as follows. The first is that of promoting by speech and writing the goals of a group founded in violation of the provision of the law—the Islamic Liberation party—which calls for dispensing with the constitution and laws, preventing state institutions from performing their work, promoting among themselves and others the group's call for considering the ruling regime as oppressive and rising against it with a view to destabilising a state based on Islamic teachings.

The second charge is that of possessing printed literature that promotes the movement's message, of distributing the literature and of showing it to others. The third and final charge is that of possessing a printing instrument—a computer—which would be used for propagating the movement's message.

Mrs. Nawaz came to see me on Friday to describe exactly how the trial was conducted. Twenty-six men were held in the courtroom in a cage in which there was standing room only. Ice cream, other food and drink were sold in the aisles to the public—during a trial in 2002. The men were not allowed any food or drink. They were allowed neither interpreters nor bail. The prosecution failed to disclose evidence and had to be ordered to do so by the judge.

The men, after much changing of the charges, are accused, among other things, of possessing books that should not have been in their possession, even though the books are London university textbooks and freely available in Egypt—in fact, the men bought them from the annual Cairo book fair. According to a press release from the solicitors Christian Fisher Khan, Hodan Pankhurst, the wife of Reza Pankhurst, has said:

"it has emerged from the trial proceedings that the so-called printed evidence against my husband and the others are actually taught in the Egyptian National Curriculum!"

Charges were changed from

"trying to overthrow the Government"

to

"being affiliated to a Moslem group that tries to overthrow the Government by speech and writing",

which is a problem given that Maajid cannot read or write Arabic. The trial has now been postponed through Ramadan. Two committees were set up to examine the issues connected to the books seized. The judge has agreed to appoint translators for the next hearing so that the accused men will know what is going on. I am glad to say that the judge is unhappy about the fact that some evidence presented by the prosecution has nothing at all to do with the men who have been charged.

Maajid was in Egypt as part of his university course, for which he was required to spend a year in either Egypt or Syria; he felt that Egypt would be the safer of the two countries. Maajid is a member of the Islamic Liberation party, which is not proscribed. That is the heart of the problem. Hassan Risvi and Hirosho Ito are not in that group: initially, they were held under the emergency law, but after 24 June they were held under criminal law.

As I said, Egypt is in contravention of the Vienna convention on consular relations. Mrs. Nawaz has a campaign going in my constituency to get support for her son, and that is working extremely well—the local newspaper, the *Southend Evening Echo* is assisting, and Mr. Andrew Baker, Maajid's former headmaster, has written to me in some detail about Maajid and told me how incredible it is to him that Maajid has been accused of trying to undermine the state of Egypt.

Forensic state doctors examined the men and found no evidence of torture, but that was done seven months after the alleged torture took place, and it is said that electrical torture can be administered in such a way as to leave no marks. Some of the men have lost the use of their limbs, or did so temporarily. They are, I am pleased to say, now freely allowed to use the toilet, and all those with Maajid in the cage have recently been contacted by their lawyers, so there has been some improvement there.

It would appear that Maajid's telephone was tapped for a week prior to his arrest because he looked up the ILP website. Maajid signed a confession, but cannot

[Mr. David Amess]

read Arabic. Reza Pankhurst signed a confession, but cannot read Arabic and needs glasses, which he did not have on him when he signed it. Hassan Risvi and Hirosho Ito both signed confessions but have been let go.

Finally, Mrs. Nawaz is very worried that, in the light of what has happened in the past, if her son is found innocent he could be released into the community, not allowed to travel to another country and be rearrested. That is a real fear of Mrs. Nawaz. I ask that the Minister have a word with the Prime Minister. If, at some stage, he is minded to intervene, I know that Maajid, his mother and all right-thinking citizens would be extremely grateful for the Prime Minister's intervention.

11.25 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) for enabling me to intervene briefly in the debate on behalf of my constituent, Ian Nisbet, whose parents I have come to know well as they live in Brackley, very near my own home in my constituency. I echo the points that my hon. Friend made so eloquently. They are compelling points, to which I add a few comments of my own.

First, I offer my sincere thanks to Her Majesty's ambassador in Cairo, and to all the consular staff both in Cairo and in London who have been involved in the case. I echo my hon. Friend's assertion that it is not a matter of criticising the Government in this case. We are all aware of the sensitivities involved.

Secondly, we need to recognise that legal systems are different. Things that are seen in one light in London are now always seen in the same light in Cairo. The culture and conditions in prison, the operation of the legal system and the rules of evidence are not likely to be the same. We must respect some degree of difference, but that does not absolve us from concern if we feel that conditions are unacceptable or intolerable. It is an important part of the consular role and the Government's role to ensure that conditions are kept to an acceptable standard, and that accused people, who are very vulnerable when they are incarcerated, are treated decently.

I draw the attention of the House to three brief points. The first is that the Islamic organisation in question is not proscribed in the United Kingdom, although it is in Egypt. That is a relevant consideration for any of us. The second is that a real concern about the evidence has been highlighted by my hon. Friend. I cite the fact that among the bundle of documents, which seems to have been comprehensive, was a sports magazine in English, a calendar, a bundle of till receipts from the supermarket, and a number of documents that do not appear to have an owner among the accused. The operation does not seem to have been very professional. That is a matter of concern.

Finally, I echo my hon. Friend's concern about conditions not only in terms of the original arrest and incarceration, but in the conduct of court proceedings, which cannot amount to an acceptable trial if people are held in cages, without being able to sit during the day, probably in considerable heat and discomfort, and in very large numbers. I would be extremely grateful for the Minister's response. We are aware of his difficulties, but we are anxious to have his co-operation in the fullest possible Government attention to the case.

11.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on securing the Adjournment debate and on bringing this important case to the attention of the House. I know that the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), have taken a keen constituency interest in the case and have followed it closely. I assure all the hon. Members and others who are present that the Government take the issue seriously and will continue to take a very close and direct interest in the way in which the case is handled.

I welcome the opportunity to set out the assistance that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has provided to Maajid Nawaz and two other British nationals who remain in detention in connection with the case. I am grateful for the kind words of hon. Members about FCO staff, and I shall pass on those messages to them.

On 1 April 2002, Maajid Nawaz, a student at the university of Alexandria, was arrested. Hassan Rizvi, Ian Nisbet and Reza Pankhurst were also arrested on 1 April.

Consular staff at our embassy in Cairo immediately sought confirmation of the arrests from the local authorities. On 7 April, it was officially confirmed that the four men had been detained by state security and we immediately sought consular access. Our consul and vice consul were allowed to visit Maajid Nawaz and the other detainees on 11 April. They appeared well but said that they had been intimidated and treated roughly in the initial days of their detention. One of the men made serious allegations of torture. The men did not, at this time, request independent medical examinations, nor did they wish embassy staff to raise the allegations of mistreatment and torture formally with the Egyptian authorities. I shall return to that subject in a moment.

In the meantime, every effort was made to secure information on the judicial process under which the men would be prosecuted. Our ambassador met senior Government officials on 18 April and 7 May, and the prosecutor general on 8 May, to seek information. My noble Friend Baroness Amos, the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for consular matters, met the Egyptian ambassador to London on 9 May to raise our concerns about the treatment of the detainees. On 22 May, Maajid Nawaz and the other men saw their legal representatives for the first time.

We were then able to ascertain that the men had been arrested under a ministerial decree issued by the Minister of the Interior. On 23 June, the decree was

overturned by the prosecutor general and the case transferred into the normal court system.

The detainees appeared in court on 4 July, 20 July and 3 August. On 4 August it was announced that three of the detainees were to face charges and that the fourth, Hassan Rizvi, was to be released. Mr Rizvi was released from custody on 12 August and subsequently returned to the United Kingdom. The relatives of the detainees were aware of the exact details of the charges faced.

The trial commenced on 20 October. Proceedings were adjourned after five hours and recommenced on 29 October. The judge, over the next three days, presented the prosecution evidence to the court and, on 31 October, proceedings were adjourned. The trial proper is expected to start on 21 December. Staff from our embassy in Cairo were present during the hearings and we hope to have someone present during any trial.

During court sessions the detainees were being held in a cage. We acknowledge that conditions have been cramped and that there have been difficulties with access to toilet facilities and the provision of drinks and food.

The lawyers registered protests with the presiding judge, and by 31 October conditions had improved. I am also pleased to be able to inform hon. Members that the detainees were able to speak to their relatives by telephone from the judge's chambers, I understand on 31 October.

We were concerned to learn about the allegations of mistreatment and torture suffered by Maajid Nawaz and the others. As I have said, when we first learned of them, the detainees asked us not raise them formally. However, the allegations were serious, and therefore were raised informally by our ambassador in meetings with the Egyptian Foreign Minister on 11 April and with the Interior Minister on 18 April. The allegations were also raised when our ambassador met senior Egyptian Government Ministers on 7 May, 8 May, 24 June and 26 June.

On 1 July, Maajid Nawaz, Reza Pankhurst and Ian Nisbet wrote letters to the Prime Minister setting out in detail the treatment they had suffered in the first four days of their detention. A request was also made for an independent medical examination.

On 3 July, the Foreign Secretary was able to raise the case when he met the Egyptian Foreign Minister. On 25 July, my noble Friend Baroness Amos wrote to the Egyptian Foreign Minister to ask that an investigation be conducted into the allegations and that the detainees be allowed access to an independent medical examination.

On 19 September, our ambassador met the prosecutor general who assured us that he had been asked to conduct an investigation into the allegations, but said that that was not yet complete. On 25 September, our ambassador wrote to the prosecutor general to ask for the results of the investigation.

We have continued to press the Egyptian authorities for a formal response. Most recently, on 8 October, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spent time discussing the case and the allegations of mistreatment and torture with the Egyptian Foreign Minister when they met in Cairo. Our ambassador spoke with the Foreign Minister on 21 October and with the Interior Minister on 24 October. A formal reply from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is still awaited.

We have been active in trying to ensure the detainees' welfare in detention. Since Maajid Nawaz was arrested on 1 April, concerns about prison conditions have been raised by the detainees and their relatives in the United Kingdom. We are unable to seek better conditions for British prisoners than those afforded to local nationals. However, through representations made to the authorities by consular staff and by working with the relatives, improvements to the prison conditions have been secured. That culminated in a move to newly refurbished cells equipped with toilet facilities in September. Maajid Nawaz, Ian Nisbet and Reza Pankhurst do not currently have any complaints about the prison conditions, although they obviously had serious concerns at an earlier stage.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): I thank the Minister for giving way. Speaking very briefly, one appreciates the sensitivities involved and our feelings are, of course, with the relatives and friends of those who are currently detained in Egypt. Does my hon. Friend accept that the difficulty that he appears to be having in getting responses to the proper queries that we have raised is unusual from a Government as friendly and helpful as the Egyptian Government have always been? One hopes that the answers will come forward very quickly, but in the meantime, will he reassure the House that British visitors to Egypt, of whom there are tens of thousands every year, need have no particular concerns? Will he acknowledge that the Egyptian authorities are extremely sensitive to these matters, but live in the light of the desperate difficulties that they experienced at Luxor some time ago?

Mr. O'Brien: There are certainly serious problems in relation to terrorism in Egypt, and the Egyptian Government are working hard, not least in co-operation with our country and others, to seek to resolve those issues. I certainly acknowledge that they have to be prepared to deal with their concerns, but we also need to ensure that any British citizens who are detained are treated properly.

The point made about whether the detainees would be able to leave the country if they are acquitted is important. We know nothing at the moment to suggest that, if they are acquitted, the Egyptian authorities would not allow them to leave Egypt. However, the formalities involved could mean that an actual release takes several days. The fourth person in this case, Hassan Rizvi, was released on 12 August following the announcement of the intention to release on 4 August, and he was able to leave the country on the same day.

On the suggestion that the Prime Minister might be involved, I hear that request from the hon. Member for Southend, West and I shall certainly consider the appropriate time when it might be looked at.

[Mr. O'Brien]

In conclusion, I assure the hon. Gentleman and others that Ministers in London and our ambassador in Cairo have taken a close personal interest in this case. Consular staff in Cairo have worked extremely hard to ensure that we have done all that we properly can to assist Maajid Nawaz, Ian Nisbet and Reza Pankhurst since their detention on 1 April. In London, our consular division has tried to maintain contact with the relatives and keep them informed of developments. Baroness Amos met the families on 7 May and 3 July. Mrs. Nawaz was able to meet our ambassador in Cairo to discuss the case during her recent visit to Egypt.

We have done what we can and we will continue to do so. This is a difficult case that is obviously traumatic for the families, and we will do all that we reasonably can to help and assist them through this difficult period.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 6 November 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Democratic Republic of the Congo

1. **Mr. Tom Clarke** (Coatbridge and Chryston): If she will make a statement on the peace process and humanitarian efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [77692]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a highly indebted poor country. Levels of poverty are terrible, and the humanitarian situation in the east is particularly serious. The Congo needs peace and a legitimate Government, which could lead to debt relief and development.

The United Kingdom has strongly supported the Lusaka peace accords, and applauds the recent engagement of South Africa in helping to drive forward the peace process. Angola, Uganda, Rwanda and Zimbabwe have withdrawn their troops from the Congo. Progress is now being held up by delays in the forming of a transitional Government incorporating all factions. There is a danger that fighting in the east will escalate as negative forces based in Congo seek to invade and destabilise Rwanda and Burundi. The United Kingdom is intensely engaged in trying to drive the peace process forward. We have provided £5 million of humanitarian aid so far this year, and will do more.

Mr. Clarke: Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who participated in the recent Inter-Parliamentary Union visit to Rwanda returned feeling gravely concerned about the escalation of genocide in an already troubled region? Does she agree that if the Kinshasa Government fail to speed the process, at a time when urgency is absolutely necessary, the situation will deteriorate further and quite needlessly?

Clare Short: I agree. The region has been terribly troubled. The history of Burundi and Rwanda, in which there have been outbreaks of genocide or killing since independence—if it can be called that—is really terrible, and the international community has neglected the region.

As I said in my answer, there is worry about a vacuum following the withdrawal of Rwanda. It is feared that that will lead to genocidal forces seeking to invade Rwanda and Burundi, and an escalation in the killing. My hon. Friend is right: we need the Kinshasa Government to agree with the United Nations, form a transitional Government and secure order throughout the country with a strengthened UN presence. The hold-up is in Kinshasa, which must be pressed to do more.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I thank the Secretary of State for all that she is doing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Does she agree that this is a classic example of a country, rich in natural resources, that could create prosperity for its own citizens but, because of bad governance and conflict, has done the opposite? I know that she will do this anyway, but may I encourage her to maintain her close interest in the country? Will she also assure us that she will make good governance a high priority for her Department? In establishing good governance in so many emerging nations, are we not taking the most important step towards giving them prosperity?

Clare Short: That is true, especially in the case of Africa. Some of the countries with the richest natural resources are the most blighted. Those resources have been misused in the colonial era and since by people who wanted the diamonds and the minerals and did not care about the conditions of the people. The Congo has been misgoverned for those reasons since King Leopold of the Belgians.

I also agree that good governance is essential, but the hon. Gentleman will remember our Front-Bench exchanges. If we are to build up powerful and effective Government institutions, we need not to fund projects outside Government but to get inside Government systems. What we need are courts that work, finance ministries, and revenue authorities that are transparent, and we have shifted our focus in that direction. Once we have peace in the Congo, it will be an enormous job to build up Government institutions that are now completely lacking.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the first recommendation of the all-party group's report, which will be published tomorrow? It asks other countries in the region, and those beyond it, to recognise the serious security concerns of Rwanda and the people of the DRC.

Will my right hon. Friend consider helping the Government of the DRC—the Kinshasa Government—to set up a civilian police force to give some protection to people in the eastern part of the Congo, where 2.5 million people have died since 1998 as a direct and indirect result of the conflict?

Clare Short: I look forward to reading the all-party group's report, and I agree with my hon. Friend. The Congo is as big as western Europe and full of rich natural resources, but it has no Government institutions and no order. All sorts of militias are being armed by different factions, and there is terrible suffering for the people, especially in the east.

I have had talks with President Kabila of the Congo to suggest that the UK and France might work with him and the new transitional Government to help establish a proper army. I think that the Kinshasa Government have used some of the militias because they did not have an army that functioned. Then we need to get on with establishing a police force.

I agree with my hon. Friend's diagnosis, but establishing a transitional Government and strengthening the UN are the first two steps we must take. We must then create a proper national army.

Afghanistan

2. **Mr. Hugo Swire** (East Devon): If she will make a statement on the progress with restructuring Afghanistan. [77693]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Much has been achieved in Afghanistan over the last 10 months. There is peace and security in Kabul, a legitimate transitional Government and a new national currency. Nearly 2 million refugees have returned home, and 3 million children are in school. The situation, however, remains very fragile. Afghanistan is a desperately poor country. The south is facing its fifth year of drought, and more than 4 million people are still dependent on food aid. The situation outside Kabul remains insecure. Warlords control large militias, and large parts of the economy depend on narcotics.

Further progress requires the establishment of security outside Kabul, and an increase in the Government's capacity to deliver services across the country. The UK will remain engaged to support continuing progress and development.

Mr. Swire: Given the failure to combat the continuing oppression and intimidation against poor farmers by regional warlords operating outside the control of the Afghan interim Government and the resulting eighteenfold increase in opium production since the removal of the Taliban, can the Secretary of State reassure the House that combating opium production in Afghanistan remains a priority of this Government? If it does, when can we expect to see the rhetoric matched by resources?

Clare Short: I must say that I find it very unappetising that the hon. Gentleman is trying to play games with the fate of a country such as Afghanistan that is trying to—*[Interruption.]* No. I really disrespect the hon. Gentleman's tone and his question. The situation in Afghanistan is very serious for its people and the future stability of the region. Security in Kabul is very important. We are about to move to agreement on the formation of a national army. That will mean the warlords having to dismantle their militias in favour of DDR—disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. There was a massive cut in drugs production because of an eradication programme led by the United Kingdom in the first year after the fall of the Taliban, so the hon. Gentleman is also factually wrong—*[Interruption.]* I do not know why he is becoming hysterical. I have just come back from Afghanistan and I think that I know rather more about it than he does. As we saw in Colombia, a country cannot be prevented from producing drugs if there is no order, no justice or national security. Establishing that is the next stage and that is what we will be doing.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): May I tell my hon. Friends that I was in Iran last week with a group of parliamentarians and met some of the 2.2 million Afghan refugees, some of whom have been in that country for more than a decade? The very strong message that they gave us was that they need more reassurance that if they return to Afghanistan they will be able to enjoy a secure environment. May I urge my right hon. Friend to press her colleagues in the international community to deliver the funding and the help that is needed to establish that security as soon as possible and to maintain that support over a long period so that refugees can return and rebuild their lives?

Clare Short: As I said earlier, 2 million refugees have returned from Pakistan, but there are more than 2 million in Iran and fewer have returned from Iran. I completely agree that, having secured the capital, which is a great achievement—Kabul is bustling with business; there are even traffic jams and little girls going to school—the same security is now needed outside Kabul. I think that we are on the brink of agreement, led by President Karzai, with the US, the UK and Japan involved, with the warlords on a process of forming a national army and disarming the militias. That will be a big process, but it is crucial to security and includes the establishment of regional security teams in the big cities outside Kabul. We will soon move forward to extending security outside Kabul and that is key to economic development. We are about to move to the second phase, which is urgently needed.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): Does the right hon. Lady agree that one way in which the drugs trade in Pakistan was reduced was by the building of roads to remote areas so that otherwise marginal crops became more valuable and could displace the drugs trade? What progress is being made towards building roads to the remote areas of Afghanistan?

Clare Short: I do not think that building roads will by itself reduce the drugs trade; indeed, it could assist it. What is needed is security and—I agree with the implication of the right hon. Gentleman's question—alternative legitimate livelihoods so that people can grow a crop, get it to market and have a legitimate life that draws them away from what is often the only crop they can grow—poppies funded by warlords. Afghanistan needs security and then more roads. There are commitments to more main roads across Afghanistan. I agree with his diagnosis and I am happy to say that we are about to move to that stage.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): A kilo of opium costs $30 in Afghanistan, $600 in Tehran and $4,000 on the streets of Britain. The Iranian authorities have deployed 42,000 soldiers and police to fight traffickers. Thousands have been killed by an army of people who often have superior equipment, such as ground-to-air missiles and night-sighted rifles. When will the British

Government give some front-line support to the fight against traffickers as well as encouraging alternative agricultural production in Afghanistan?

Clare Short: Given my hon. Friend's knowledge of prices, I am surprised that he does not know that we have been heavily engaged in supporting the building of intelligence units. Groups in Afghanistan have the capacity to destroy laboratories and stocks, but that will not work without creating a secure country. Afghanistan became a narcotics-growing paradise because it is a completely failed state without any justice. It is run by corruption—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I urge hon. Members to give the Secretary of State the opportunity to reply to the House. Such noise is bad manners.

Clare Short: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My hon. Friend is right to say that there must be interdiction, but justice, security and the chance of a decent alternative life are also necessary, and we are working on all those things.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): On Monday, the Secretary of State for Defence said that it was too early to say what provisions would be made for security in Afghanistan after the expiry of United Nations authorisation for international peacekeeping on 20 December. However, the Secretary of State for International Development has just said that we will remain so engaged. Does that commitment bind her right hon. Friend, and when will she make a statement to the House?

Clare Short: I am afraid that the hon. Lady is muddling two things. The international security assistance force, which is securing Kabul, is currently led by the Turks. International negotiations are taking place about who will lead the next phase of the force. The second issue that is being discussed is bringing security to the cities outside Kabul. It is not suggested that that will be done by ISAF, but agreement is imminent. The United States will take the lead in most places, and the United Kingdom will engage. However, that issue is not connected with the future of ISAF.

Sanitation

3. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What plans she has to contribute to the achievement of the 2015 target for access to sanitation. [77694]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): My Department worked very hard to get international agreement to the sanitation target, and we are now working to achieve the target through partner countries' strategies for poverty reduction. More than half the world's population have no access to sanitation—a situation that contributes directly to diseases that kill more than 2 million children every year. My Department's bilateral spending on sanitation, hygiene promotion and clean water has risen from £84.3 million in 1999–2000 to £87.2 million this year.

Mr. Chaytor: Does my hon. Friend agree that action on sanitation has to be seen in the context of the other millennium targets on poverty reduction, water and energy? Following the sustainable development summit in Johannesburg in September, is she more optimistic that these targets will be achieved, or less optimistic?

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that those targets fit together as a package, and we are achieving more success with some of them than with others. The targets relating to child health and maternal health are probably the most difficult to meet, and sub-Saharan Africa presents more difficulties than other parts of the world. However, we are very confident, and we are working carefully towards achieving the target on sanitation and access to clean water.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): *[Interruption.]* In welcoming the commitment to provide proper sanitation for 800 million of the world's poorest people, will the Minister admit that, unfortunately, that was one of relatively few specific commitments agreed to at the Johannesburg world summit on sustainable development? Will she have a word with her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development to ask the Leader of the House to do all that he can to provide at the earliest opportunity in the new Session a debate on that summit, which was one of the most important ever?

Ms Keeble: I am not sure what the reason was for the congratulations offered to the hon. Gentleman at the beginning of his question. As he is an engineer, he will know a great deal about the provision of water—*[Interruption.]* Okay, he is a building engineer.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I am an engineer.

Ms Keeble: I am delighted to hear that. The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) knows a great deal about the provision of water and sanitation. Our assessment of the world summit on sustainable development was that it was a great success. The commitment to which he refers was a key one, and it will contribute to improving the health of, and saving the lives of, 2 million children a year—a very substantial achievement. On his other comments, my right hon. Friend has doubtless heard them and will take note of them.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Does my hon. Friend accept that debt relief is one of the most effective ways of poor countries reaching the millennium development goals for sanitation? Is she urging her counterparts in other countries and, most importantly, the multinational institutions to match at least the Government's record on debt relief? In particular, does not she think that a list of shame of those countries that

are not playing their part to ensure that the world's poorest counties reach the millennium development goals in sanitation and other areas should be produced?

Ms Keeble: I certainly agree that the Government have led the world in the initiative on debt relief and that it is important that other countries fulfil their commitments, too, but, in addition to the spending on sanitation and water infrastructure, it is also important that we have proper management, regulation and educational programmes so that we can achieve the millennium development goal that has been set. My Department has also led the world in the financial commitments and in working with partner Governments to ensure that we achieve that goal.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): We strongly support the Secretary of State's commitment to reducing by half the number of people in the world without sanitation, but it is most disappointing to hear that there will be only a couple of million pounds extra in the aid budget. Can we really see no more commitment than that? After all, the Johannesburg summit cost £33 million, but all we get is £2 million.

Ms Keeble: The amount of money that I mentioned was only for the bilateral programme. I did not include, because it cannot completely set out, the amount of money that we spend through the country programme, to which I also referred, and the substantial amount of money that goes through the multilateral programme. We are leading the way in terms of the amount of money and the technical assistance that we provide, as well as the work that we are doing to ensure that not only is the infrastructure provided, but the management, regulation and education that goes with it. We are making a major contribution towards saving 2 million children a year.

Famine (Southern Africa)

4. **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): If she will make a statement on the food crisis in southern Africa. [77695]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): In southern Africa, the number in need of food and other urgent humanitarian assistance is growing and will reach 14 million by March next year. The United Nations appeal is only 40 per cent. funded. The United Kingdom is the second largest donor after the United States. I am working to encourage my colleagues in other countries to increase their commitment. This is a very complex crisis. The drought is badly exacerbated by weaknesses in governance and economic management in Zambia and Malawi and by gross misgovernment in Zimbabwe. Levels of HIV/AIDS infection have weakened populations now facing serious malnourishment. The international community has not yet responded adequately to the crisis, and it is likely to escalate badly. I fear that we will see a terrible catastrophe.

Mr. Luke: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I, like her, have been involved in discussions with non-governmental organisations and have taken part in debates on the unfolding human tragedy in southern Africa. I am well aware of the role played by the political leaders of countries such as Zimbabwe and Malawi in adding to the enormity of the famine facing there. Does she agree, however, that the international community should not use the Government of Mugabe or Muluzi as an excuse to walk away from the peoples of Zimbabwe, Malawi and the southern Africa region?

Clare Short: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend, and the situation is very worrying. For such a serious crisis, to have only 40 per cent. funding for the UN appeal is very unusual. My guess is that that is because of the reputation of President Mugabe, but the people of Zimbabwe are the victims of President Mugabe, and the international community must not turn its back. One in three Zimbabweans are affected by HIV/AIDS. If those people do not get food and emergency health supplies, there will be catastrophic human suffering. The international community must not turn its back. Unappetising as President Mugabe is, the people deserve our support.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The Secretary of State accepts that a major factor in the impending famine in southern Africa is Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. Food aid for his people is being diverted to supporters of ZANU-PF. Given that fact, and reports of trouble in Matabeleland, what is the right hon. Lady's view of the US proposals, recently reported in the *Washington Times*, to deliver food directly to the people of Zimbabwe and, if necessary, to effect regime change in that country?

Clare Short: There is no doubt that the situation is very difficult. The Government of Zimbabwe are attempting to control which NGOs can work, and their diversion of some food for political reasons makes the problem more complex. The Government, the UN and the whole international community are standing together to resist that. However, we must stay engaged, or vast numbers of people will lose their lives.

I saw Andrew Natsios, the head of USAID, fairly recently, but I am not aware of any plan to provide food aid in a way that will bring down the Mugabe regime. Keeping people fed and giving them health care is a complex enough problem, and we must focus on that. My hunch is that the disaster will bring down the Mugabe regime, after which there will be an enormous job of reconstruction to do.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Does the Secretary of State accept that we also must bear some responsibility for the famine in southern Africa, as our system of subsidised agriculture distorts world markets and prevents African farmers from securing a sustainable livelihood? I remind the Secretary of State that yesterday she said that failure to reform the European common agricultural policy would mean the end of the Doha agreement. Is not that meaningless in light of the Prime Minister's rebuff at the European summit last week?

Clare Short: The hon. Lady is trying, but I am sorry to say that she is getting things slightly wrong. What happened at the European summit was that France had

agreed that there should be no increased spending on the CAP when the EU is enlarged. That is good, as far as it goes. Keeping the CAP going and spending more and more would be a disaster. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister caused some irritation, we are told, because he stood up at the summit and insisted that the EU adhere to the commitments made at Doha. That requires progress on the mid-term review of the CAP.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that she perhaps ought to revisit the question of food aid in Zimbabwe? There is evidence that food is being denied to people who are not members of ZANU-PF. If that is happening, it is a form of genocide. We will be judged very harshly if we sit back and do nothing and do not question the people in control in Zimbabwe.

Clare Short: I assure my hon. Friend that we are not sitting back and doing nothing. As I have said, the UK is the second-biggest donor to the emergency fund, and our emergency team has some of the best experts in the world working in the region. We are doing everything that we can to work around a bad Government, to keep people fed and to prevent the abuse of food aid.

By and large, we are succeeding. The regime is attempting to misuse food aid, but we must keep working so that the regime will not prevent those who did not vote for it from receiving any assistance at all. We cannot allow that to happen.

Ethiopia

5. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If the Secretary of State for International Development will make a statement on the development aid that she is providing to Ethiopia.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Ethiopia has a population of 67 million people and is one of the poorest countries in the world, with gross domestic product at only $100 per head. We are now building up a development partnership with Ethiopia, which has been delayed by the war with Eritrea. We intend to support Ethiopia's poverty reduction strategy, which provides a strong basis for partnership and dialogue. The Ethiopian Government are showing a strong commitment to poverty reduction, and we plan to expand our programme of assistance significantly over the next few years.

However, Ethiopia has a history of highly centralised Government, human rights abuse and continued reliance on food aid. The Government are committed to reform and democratisation, but the reform effort will be difficult and will require sustained support.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that response. However, she will be aware that the war with Eritrea has been over for some while now and the Government in Ethiopia are showing a commitment to democracy and reform. Ethiopia is anxious to know exactly how the Government will help with the poverty reduction strategy and when the Department for International Development expects to implement the country plan. I am to visit Ethiopia in December and I know that its Government are very anxious to learn in detail how we may be able to help them.

Clare Short: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that the war has been over for such a long time. We had plans to expand our programme in Ethiopia that were delayed by the war, which we also tried to avoid. Nearly 100,000 young men lost their lives and the economies of both countries were damaged in a war over a barren piece of land. That was a tragedy for the people of both countries. We are in detailed discussion with the Ethiopia Government and have advanced plans. They will be published very shortly, and I will make sure that a copy is sent to the hon. Gentleman.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [77722] **Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 6 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Mark Tami: Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm the need for a United Nations resolution to secure the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq? What progress has been made to this end and, if progress has been made, as press reports indicate, when can we expect their return?

The Prime Minister: I understand that at 3.30 today a United Nations resolution will be tabled in the Security Council. I spoke to President Bush about this a few moments ago. I pay tribute to the Foreign Secretary and the United Nations team who have worked so hard to secure this resolution. I hope very much that it is passed and has support. It will be a tough new inspection regime; it will be free from the problems of the past and it will make it very clear that there must be complete and total disarmament in Iraq of weapons of mass destruction—chemical, biological and nuclear—and that if not, action will follow. However, it is not conflict that is inevitable, but the disarmament of those weapons of mass destruction. The best and surest way to avoid conflict is for Iraq to comply with the will of the United Nations, to let the inspectors back in and to have the disarmament process begin.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I join the Prime Minister in welcoming any such resolution that will deliver peace in that region and also the full disarmament of Iraq.

Will the Prime Minister now rule out legislation in this Parliament for top-up fees—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I have made it clear that we shall abide by our manifesto commitment.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister did not answer the question. I specifically asked him if he would rule out legislating in this Parliament for top-up fees. Will he, yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I have just told the right hon. Gentleman that we will abide completely by the manifesto commitment that we gave. As for the proposals that the Government come up with, I am afraid that he will have to await the outcome of the review.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Before the last election, the Prime Minister said:

"We will not introduce 'top-up' fees".

The Prime Minister's answer today indicates clearly to students up and down the country that, because he will not rule out legislation in this Parliament, he will introduce top-up fees costing them thousands of pounds. How can any family believe a word that he ever says?

The Prime Minister: They can believe it precisely because the language that we used in the manifesto is language that I am happy to repeat now. Before the right hon. Gentleman accuses us of any particular course of action, I suggest that he awaits the outcome of the review, when he may find that some of his strictures are unjustified.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): The Prime Minister and other party leaders in this place will represent us and the nation on Remembrance day on Sunday. Will my right hon. Friend take a few minutes before Sunday to review the handful of cases that Members on both sides of the House have on war veterans, most of whom are now in their 80s—some from the Enigma project, the Arctic convoys, Suez and other campaigns. They are still denied the medals and the recognition that they morally deserve because the Ministry of Defence has a mean-minded, pettifogging interpretation of the rules and regulations, some of which are half a century old. Will my right hon. Friend, in the spirit of remembrance, use his power to cleave through that bureaucracy and give those elderly men and women the recognition they deserve, while they are still with us?

The Prime Minister: First, I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to all those who made such sacrifices during both world wars so that this nation could remain a free and democratic country. He will know that the policy on that has been the policy of successive Governments over a long period. He will know too that we have done a great deal as a Government to improve the position of veterans and their dependants. Of course, we will keep those issues under review. I have heard what my hon. Friend has said—I am sure that the Ministry of Defence has too—but must come back to him later as I cannot give him the assurance that he wants today.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Given the proper priority, which the Government continue to claim to give, to the protection of vulnerable people in care in our society, will the Prime Minister explain why 300,000 people providing that care have had their Criminal Records Bureau background checks abandoned indefinitely?

The Prime Minister: We are trying to focus on those who may have implications for the most vulnerable in our society. It is important to realise that the Criminal Records Bureau is handling far more cases than ever before, and we should concentrate on people in the categories where there may be the most risk. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would agree with that.

Mr. Kennedy: Surely the thousands of families who have vulnerable relatives in precisely that position of care deserve better reassurance from the Prime Minister? Can he therefore give us a commitment or a time scale? When will those checks be resumed and, most importantly, when will they be completed?

The Prime Minister: We will do the necessary checks as soon as possible, but we have withdrawn certain categories because we believe that it is important to concentrate on those categories of people where there may be the greatest risk. Incidentally, may I tell the Liberal Democrats that I have no doubt that if we did not take a more flexible and sensible attitude, the right hon. Gentleman would be up on his feet accusing us of unnecessary bureaucracy.

Vera Baird (Redcar): After the trial of David Shayler, which ended yesterday at the Old Bailey, will my right hon. Friend consider whether a public interest defence ought to be available to somebody who discloses unlawful conduct by the security services? I am making no comment about Shayler's case, but would not a carefully drafted public interest defence offer a sensible extra means of control over the intelligence community and, at the same time, give protection to people of conscience by allowing a jury to assess whether on the whole the public has been benefited or harmed by disclosure?

The Prime Minister: With respect to my hon. and learned Friend, I am afraid that I do not agree. It is right that people who work for our security services undertake certain obligations of confidentiality. There is really no way in which we can protect our country otherwise. In these troubled times, it must be clear to people—I will not comment on the individual case—that if they work for the British security services they

must abide by their conditions of employment and confidentiality. If they do not, I am afraid they will face the full force of the law.

Q2. [77723] **Mr. John Taylor** (Solihull): The Prime Minister has suspended Stormont. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland says that next May's elections will take place—to what?

The Prime Minister: The elections are for the Assembly, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I very much hope, however, that we can get the process up and running again. The Executive has been suspended because, I am afraid, we do not have the proper consent to run it at the moment. I very much hope, however, that we can get to a position in which the peace process is up and running again, as frankly that is the only way forward for people in Northern Ireland.

Q3. [77724] **David Winnick** (Walsall, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there are legitimate questions to be asked about the case that collapsed last Friday? Why was it started in the first place? Were the Law Officers consulted about the prosecution, and why, apparently, were public interest immunity certificates applied for to the judge? Was it considered that the evidence of the person concerned would be harmful to the state? There should be a statement. There seems to be a lot of mystery about the matter and it should be cleared up.

The Prime Minister: I think that I am right in saying that public interest immunity certificates did not arise in this case, but I do not really have anything to add to what I said on Monday. Obviously, as I said then, the Crown Prosecution Service will want to learn the lessons of the case that has collapsed in those circumstances, but I do not see any reason for changing our constitutional conventions or precedents.

Q4. [77725] **Richard Younger-Ross** (Teignbridge): Does the Prime Minister recall that on 16 July he was presented with a petition, highlighting the fact that Devon schoolchildren are worth £195 a year less of standard spending assessment than the national average? On receiving that petition the Prime Minister told head teacher Helen Nicholls:

"I will come back to you as soon as I possibly can with a detailed response."

Can the Prime Minister say when she will receive that response and will he now guarantee that the funding gap between Devon schoolchildren and those in the rest of the country will be closed?

The Prime Minister: We will announce the outcome of the review of local government funding in early December, as the hon. Gentleman knows. That is when the response will be. When I met people from his constituency and from the county of Devon, they made extremely reasonable points, but I pointed out that reforming the system of local government finance was difficult. I understand their concerns, but I know that he will agree that Devon's education standard spending assessment has increased by nearly £60 million during the past few years. That is an average increase of almost 6 per cent. a year. I understand the issue about the gap, but it is worth pointing out that everybody in every part of the country has benefited from the record investment in education.

Q5. [77726] **Ann McKechin** (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does the Prime Minister agree with me and the many constituents who have contacted me this month that it is time that the Government introduced even tougher regulations on the sale of fireworks and, in particular, that they permit the licensing of shops that sell them, in order to control the dangerous and irresponsible behaviour that blights so many in our communities and causes so much distress?

The Prime Minister: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. I know that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have similar concerns. My hon. Friend will know that, earlier this month, a number of measures were announced by the Department of Trade and Industry to cut the number of firework injuries. They included such things as a crackdown on illegal markets in fireworks and the use of fixed penalty notices, which are being piloted at present and, hopefully, will be rolled out across the country. We have also launched a national safety campaign.

We keep the rest of the law under close review. Obviously, we need to balance people's desire for safety and for dealing with the antisocial behaviour aspects with the need not to be overly bureaucratic or regulatory. We are looking at the matter and we keep it under constant review, but I understand my hon. Friend's concern.

Q6. [77727] **Mr. Gary Streeter** (South West Devon): Is the Prime Minister aware that in Plymouth and in various parts of the country waiting times for a heroin addict voluntarily to access detox treatment can be well over six months? Given police estimates that 80 per cent. of all acquisitive crime is drug-related and bearing in mind the misery and concern for the addict, for families and for victims, will the Prime Minister take another urgent look at this matter and, if necessary, redirect resources so that any person who takes the brave decision to kick the habit has immediate access to treatment?

The Prime Minister: The point that the hon. Gentleman raises is right. We are doing two things about it. First, we have established the national treatment agency to try to ensure that what is available in certain parts of the country is available in all parts. Secondly, we are putting hundreds of millions of pounds extra—that is being rolled out over the next few years—into treatment for drug addicts. The hon. Gentleman is right: it is essential. Although we may be able to do this only in the highest crime areas to begin with, I want to reach a situation where people are tested for drugs when arrested; if they are tested and found positive, they should be given the opportunity to have treatment quickly; but if they refuse that treatment, it should be taken into account when considering their bail or their

prison sentence, for example, if they are convicted. I entirely agree that the issue is urgent, but we are working on it.

Q7. [77728] **Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd): Has the Prime Minister had the chance to read my speech in a recent Adjournment debate on antisocial behaviour? What measures does he intend to take to ensure that the polices that we are introducing to tackle antisocial behaviour—such as antisocial behaviour orders, antisocial behaviour contracts, parenting orders, stricter tenancy agreements and on-the-spot fines—are being implemented on the ground by crime and disorder partnerships in the UK?

The Prime Minister: I have not read the speech—[*Interruption*]. I have not read the speech yet. From what my hon. Friend says—if that was a summary of it—I entirely agree with him. There will be a series of measures on antisocial behaviour. Antisocial behaviour orders have been successful where introduced, but they have been too difficult to introduce. Therefore, we are looking at a series of reforms to make them easier to get, to implement and to enforce.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith: Will the Prime Minister abide by the result of the referendum in Gibraltar tomorrow?

The Prime Minister: More than that, we have made it absolutely clear that there can be no change in the constitutional position of the people of Gibraltar without their consent. At the moment, there are no proposals on the table. We know what the referendum result will be—*[Interruption.]* We know because it is very clear. In the end, people in Gibraltar should realise that there will be and can be no change—it is not merely a question of proposals that we come up with now—without their express consent.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister said in this House that he would

"never consent to any arrangement that goes against the freely expressed wishes of the people of Gibraltar." [*Official Report*, 16 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 388.]

Tomorrow, they are going freely to express their wishes. Why will not the Prime Minister stand by the result?

The Prime Minister: I have just made that clear, and I entirely concur with the statement that he quoted earlier. It is for that reason that I say again that there can be no change to the constitutional position of the people of Gibraltar without their consent. I said what I did about the referendum because there are no proposals on the table. However, let me make it clear to him that the process that we began of discussion with Spain and with people in Gibraltar—a process that began under the last Conservative Government; that is why it is the sheerest hypocrisy for the Conservatives to oppose it now—is right because it is in the interests of people in Britain, in Spain and in Gibraltar. But as I repeated a moment or two ago, it is their free expression of will that has to count.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The people of Gibraltar do not want the Prime Minister's grubby deal. I remind him that the international observers at tomorrow's referendum are led by his right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who said that this House should

"not accept the sell-out of Gibraltar by a Labour Government." [*Official Report*, 12 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 1174.]

Should not the Prime Minister now bury this shameful deal, respect the referendum and stand up for the people of Gibraltar?

The Prime Minister: First, if I were the right hon. Gentleman I would not go against grubby deals too much. He may have need of a few of them, I think. Secondly, this is not a grubby deal. We have not actually tabled proposals. However, we have continued—in my view, absolutely rightly—the process that began under the last Conservative Government. We continued it because I happen to believe that it is in the interests of the people of Spain, of Britain and of Gibraltar. Having said that, the one thing that is abundantly clear—I have said it throughout and I repeat it now—is that there can be no change in the constitutional position of the people of Gibraltar without their express consent. I should have thought that that was clear enough, even for the right hon. Gentleman.

Q8. [77729] **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the BBC "Great Britons" poll, and to the number of scientists and inventors nominated? Those people not only contributed to the wealth of the UK but created many jobs for others. Bearing in mind that Doncaster does not have a university yet, and many young people do not see the relevance of science to their future job prospects, how can he ensure that, in future polls, we will still see the importance of science and that it will help to contribute to more jobs in south Yorkshire?

The Prime Minister: A huge amount of additional resources will go into science over the next few years—about £2 billion. Not only is that more than under the last Conservative Government, but it is investment to which the Conservatives are opposed, as they are opposed to the additional investment in education. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the importance of teaching science in schools. That is one of the reasons why we are not just putting more resources in but allowing specialist schools to develop, particularly in relation to science and technology. That, together with the other policies that the Government are pursuing in science, gives us the best chance of repeating in the future some of the huge successes of British science in the past.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Prime Minister has acknowledged in a recent response that the drugs rehabilitation question is urgent. May I urge on him the need to look again at resources, and particularly at a simple change in current tactics? All drugs money confiscated should be ring-fenced to go into rehabilitation, as there is dire need—at this moment, there are fewer than 40 rehabilitation places available throughout the whole of Wales.

The Prime Minister: We do need to make sure that there are more rehabilitation places. However, a vast amount of additional resources is going into drug

treatment, and additional money is going into drug treatment in prison, as that is important, too. Many of the people in prison are drug addicts and desperately need help. I concur with what the hon. Gentleman says, but we are trying to roll out increasingly well-targeted programmes to make sure that people who are on drugs get the chance to go straight—if they do not do so, it is important that we use the force of the law against them.

Q9. [77730] **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is unfair that clergy and ministers of religion have no employment rights, and no redress against unfair dismissal? Can I tell the House about my constituent Paul McNab, who was dismissed from the Salvation Army when he was sick without any medical examination. His wife also lost her job in the Salvation Army, and they have no redress to anti-discrimination legislation whatever. Will he extend employment rights to all ministers of religion in all faiths and denominations, so that they have the same rights as all other occupations?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend may know that we are currently conducting a review into the extension of employment rights to give job protection to people who are particularly at risk in certain walks of life. As part of that, we are looking at the issue of those who are employed by religious faiths. I cannot tell him the outcome of the review yet, but clearly the case of Mr. McNab is germane to that review, and I am sure that it will be taken into account.

Q10. [77731] **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): Why has the Prime Minister abandoned his support for urban sub-post offices? Two years ago, he said that he would work positively to ensure that all sub-post offices were able to become government general practitioners. He has now abandoned that and is instead bribing sub-postmasters with £180 million of taxpayers' money to close down their services. Is not that a great disservice to the pensioners in Christchurch and many other boroughs?

The Prime Minister: In fact, we have an agreement with the sub-postmasters, and we will be investing hundreds of millions of pounds in the postal network over the next few years. It is inevitable, I am afraid, that some sub-post offices will close—incidentally, under the last Conservative Government thousands closed up and down the country. It is therefore absurd to pretend that there is an easy solution. However, we are putting in a lot of extra investment so that those sub-post offices that can survive and that have a viable future are given one. The very reason we entered into the agreement with the sub-postmasters is that they recognise, unlike the hon. Gentleman, that there is a genuine problem to be tackled.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): A 14-year-old boy, Matthew Sheffield, died in my constituency as a consequence of an accident with an airgun. Will my right hon. Friend outline his thoughts as to how these weapons, which have a potential lethal capacity, can be controlled, if not banned?

The Prime Minister: May I express through my hon. Friend my condolences to her constituent's family? Like other issues to do with antisocial behaviour, that problem is right at the top of people's agenda and it worries Members of Parliament. My hon. Friend knows that we are considering the whole issue of licensing air guns and will have something to announce on that in the next available period of time. Obviously, once again we have to balance the need to take action with the need not to overregulate. The issue is key and critical, and I know that a campaign on it has been going on for a long time in the north-east.

Q11. [77732] **Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): Will the Prime Minister look again at the guidelines given to the national lottery award-giving body, the community fund, so that those organisations that care for groups such as war veterans and the elderly get their fair share of the money? Those are the most vulnerable people in our society and they gave so much to our country. It is about time we repaid their service to Britain, rather than giving to some of the politically correct organisations which seem to be getting large sums of money.

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman would want to acknowledge that the community fund has given an awful lot of money to veterans' organisations and others. In the end, there is a simple choice: either we can have a body that objectively gives that money out to groups or we can do it by involving politicians. I think it is better that it is done objectively through the community fund. The concerns that the hon. Gentleman expresses have been expressed by other hon. Members too, but we should not let one or two cases mislead us into thinking that the lottery money is not, on the whole, extremely well used for the benefit of community groups throughout the country, including veterans' groups.

Q12. [77733] **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): How can there be a more important public interest than that a defendant should receive a fair trial? Lord Justice Scott made his position on public interest immunity certificates very clear following the Matrix Churchill trial. Given the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick), can my right hon. Friend confirm that there were no discussions between the Attorney-General and the prosecuting authorities in the case of the Crown *v.* Paul Burrell to authorise an application for a public interest immunity certificate?

The Prime Minister: There was no application for a public interest immunity certificate. Obviously, when such a case arises there are all sorts of wild theories about what might or might not have happened, but that is not why the case collapsed. I assure my hon. Friend that the issue of public interest immunity certificates is not relevant to either the case or why it folded.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): On Sunday, it will be six months since the rail crash at Potters Bar in which two of my constituents died. The bereaved, those who were injured and those who travel on that line every day still have no conclusive answers to why that crash happened and how it can be prevented from happening again. What personal steps have the

Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Transport taken to expedite sufficient answers to why that crash occurred?

The Prime Minister: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns and those of his constituents. A process needs to be undergone to ensure we know exactly what lessons can be learned. Of course it is important that that happens as quickly as possible, but it is also important that it is as thorough as possible. We simply have to let the process work its way through and come to a conclusion. As soon as we can give answers to those questions that concern the families of the hon. Gentleman's constituents, we will.

Q13. [77734] **Mr. Tom Watson** (West Bromwich, East): Given the fact that there were 20,000 violent attacks on shop workers last year alone, will the Prime Minister support the campaign by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers to make the tackling of retail crime a key performance indicator for the police?

The Prime Minister: I think I should have a discussion with the Home Secretary before I commit myself to that, but my hon. Friend is right to stress the importance of the issue. USDAW has properly highlighted the problem over the past few years and we certainly believe that action against retail crime is one very important part of the action against crime generally.

Q14. [77735] **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): Is the Prime Minister aware of the great concern among hon. Members on both sides of the House about the lack of time for consultation on the air services review? Will he please ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to extend that consultation period in the interests of fair play?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. He will know that we are trying to balance ensuring that we have the broadest possible consultation with the urgent need to get decisions. As I think that he will accept, there is a genuine and urgent necessity to ensure that we get decisions on those issues.

Q15. [77736] **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): Will my right hon. Friend look again at state assistance for the British coal industry? As he will be aware, in our on-going review of our energy requirements there is huge doubt about the future viability of that industry and further state aid is required, under the scheme that ended a few months ago. Will he look again at that?

The Prime Minister: I can only say what, as my hon. Friend will know, discussions are taking place with the coal industry within the Department of Trade and Industry. He will also know that in the past few years we have given additional support to the coal industry. We have to do that against the background of the tight limits on public spending, for reasons that he knows. However, discussions are under way and I hope that they will be fruitful.

Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiry Reports

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the Government's response to the foot and mouth disease inquiry reports. That response is being published today.

When the inquiry reports were published in July, I told the House that I accepted that mistakes had been made and that I was determined to learn the lessons of what happened in 2001. The independent inquiry process that concluded in July has enabled us to do that and to move forward quickly to implement the recommendations. We are indebted to Sir Brian Follett and Dr. Iain Anderson, and I pay tribute again to them and to their teams for producing such thorough and useful reports so quickly. The Government accept virtually all the detailed recommendations of the lessons learned report and firmly endorse the lessons that Dr. Anderson draws. The recommendations made by the Royal Society will also play a major role in shaping the Government's work in that area. The Public Accounts Committee is considering a separate report from the National Audit Office.

The Government's response to the inquiries contains a wide range of commitments and actions, including a stronger general framework for emergency preparedness, with special emphasis on response and disease control in an outbreak of animal disease and work on strengthening disease prevention. Alongside publication of that response today, the latest version of our contingency plans is available on our website for comment and consultation.

Inevitably, some of that considerable body of work is work in progress and much requires further development and an open and transparent process of consultation with a wide range of players, including the farming industry, the wider rural community and other key players such as the local authorities.

Dr. Anderson identified three key areas for handling any outbreak: systems, speed of response and the necessity for good science as the basis of that response. As the House may recall from my July statement, some steps, such as the establishment of a civil contingencies secretariat, have already been taken. From next year, they will be supplemented by dedicated contingency planning teams in every region, based in the Government offices.

Plans are being developed for training and rehearsal of contingency plans, together with other players, such as local authorities. In addition, procedures are being drawn up to ramp up organisation should that be required, including the maintenance of a register of staff willing to serve in an emergency, and of their competences and skills.

Both inquiries called for a body to provide advice to DEFRA's chief scientific adviser in emergencies, and for a review of priorities in animal health research. A science advisory group has been set up, some additional funding for veterinary teaching and research has been identified and the review of priorities is under way. The Government are committed to funding necessary research into animal disease and to increasing spending on that. Work is also under way on how to identify and manage risks as part of DEFRA's own development plans. In particular, a risk assessment report on illegal imports is in preparation, and I hope to receive it before the turn of the year.

In the meantime, we have secured the agreement of Commissioner Byrne to a ban on personal imports of meat. We have put extra resources into detection and enforcement, including piloting the use of detector dogs, and I can announce today that the Government have agreed that responsibility for anti-smuggling checks on animals, fish, plants and their products, including meat, should be placed on one body, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, as soon as that can be achieved.

No import controls can ever be 100 per cent. effective. That is why both inquiries emphasised the role that animal movement controls can play in checking the spread of disease. The Government have accepted the advice that the 20-day standstill rule should remain in place until a detailed risk assessment and wide-ranging cost-benefit analysis have been completed.

We have commissioned the necessary economic and modelling studies from experts outside DEFRA, with the aim of deciding on a proportionate level of controls, and in particular, whether a movement standstill of 20 days strikes the right balance between the disease control benefits and the costs on the industry and livestock markets. Emerging findings from these studies should be available at the end of this month, to feed into decisions on the shape of movement controls to apply from next February. We expect full and final results in the first half of next year. As the inquiry reports recognise, the farming industry, too, shares responsibility for minimising disease risks and has a crucial role to play, particularly with regard to biosecurity. We will work closely with the industry in following up the inquiries' recommendations in this regard.

We also intend to work closely with the industry in developing a comprehensive animal health and welfare strategy, which has been called for by both inquiries and by the policy commission chaired by Sir Don Curry. It is important that we share an agreed vision, which must cover protection of public health, animal disease prevention and control and animal welfare. Informal discussions with stakeholders are already taking place before the launch of a public consultation exercise later in the year across the breadth of the stakeholder community. The strategy will draw on the inquiry reports and will provide a vehicle for implementing many recommendations.

We will also use the consultation on the strategy as a means to discuss with stakeholders the best mechanism to provide regular reports on animal disease preparedness, so that the lessons learned as a result of the 2001 outbreak and the recommendations of the inquiries are implemented and help to ensure that the experience of 2001 is never repeated.

The House will want to know that else would be different in any future outbreak of foot and mouth disease. A national movement ban would be put in place as soon as the first case was confirmed, as my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State announced in the summer when our interim contingency plan was published.

[Margaret Beckett]

Restricted infected areas, so-called blue boxes, would be declared from the start in a minimum 10 km radius around infected farms, but public rights of way would need to be restricted only in a 3 km radius from those farms.

International and European Union rules are based on the need to eradicate a disease that is unpleasant as well as highly infectious. Hence the basic strategy in all FMD-free countries is that, as a first step, animals infected with foot and mouth disease and animals that have had contact with them have to be culled. But both inquiries are saying and the Government accept that in some circumstances, additional action may be needed to control an outbreak. In that case, emergency vaccination will form part of the control strategy from the start, and this would be emergency vaccination to live, provided of course that scientific and veterinary advice is that this would be the most effective course.

The inquiries point out that the use of emergency vaccination to live raises a number of very difficult issues—scientific, logistical and economic—but the Government are committed to tackling those issues in consultation with interested parties, with the aim of being in a position to trigger an emergency vaccination campaign should the need arise. However, the issues are substantial and that process will take some time to complete.

Sadly, that does not mean that wider culling strategies will never again be needed. We must maintain a full armoury of weapons to tackle the diseases; hence our insistence on the flexibility proposed in the Animal Health Bill and in the lessons learned report to allow for pre-emptive culling to enable us to deal with an outbreak more quickly with fewer losses of animals and least disruption to the rural economy. The Government are consulting on a decision tree on foot and mouth disease control that would set out the factors to be taken into account in deciding the best disease control strategy for different circumstances, but we have to remember that each outbreak is unique and that we cannot prescribe in detail in advance how best to meet it. There will still be a need for scientific and veterinary judgment at the time.

For the longer term, the Royal Society recommended that research was needed on a vaccine that could be used routinely, rather than just in an emergency, against all strains of foot and mouth disease virus and for all species. The Government recognise that that would be a desirable long-term goal and will encourage international collaboration to that end, but the House will appreciate that we are some considerable way from achieving that.

In short, some three months only after publication of the inquiry reports, the Government are today able not only to respond formally to those reports, but to identify a massive programme of work and reform that is under way. Nothing can ever erase the horrors and tragedies of the 2001 epidemic of foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom, but we can all resolve to establish more effective safeguards and, should those safeguards fail, an even more effective response.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and for her courtesy in letting me have early sight both of it and the accompanying document published by the Government.

We will obviously want to study the Government's response in detail, but on a first reading, I can say that much of what is proposed seems sensible and welcome and that the proposals include measures that we can support. I hope that the open and transparent process of consultation to which the Secretary of State referred will number Members of Parliament among the key stakeholders and that the Government will make an early opportunity available in Government time for a full debate in the House on their response to the various inquiries.

I should like to ask a couple of questions about vaccination. How long does the Secretary of State anticipate that it will be until the Government are in a position to include emergency vaccination in their armoury of measures for tackling a future outbreak? How does the approach outlined today in the response document relate to the draft European Commission proposals for a new directive on the control of foot and mouth disease?

Much of the document deals with the internal workings of the Department. I hope that she will be able to acknowledge that the Government recognise that one of the lessons from the 2001 outbreak was the need for greater freedom to be given to local veterinary surgeons and officials on the ground, so that they could take decisions quickly without always having to refer them back to head office to be second-guessed there.

Although there is much that we can welcome, I want to press the Secretary of State more critically on three subjects. I was somewhat disappointed to find when scanning the document that it contained only seven paragraphs on the illegal import of meat, compared with 14 on media strategy and communications. Does she appreciate that travellers who have been using British ports and airports in the seven months since the Government's action plan was published have found that even the limited and belated targets that the Government set themselves back in March have not made any difference to their experience when they arrive at a British port of entry?

Is she confident that Customs and Excise will give adequate priority to this important new responsibility when it is set alongside the many other responsibilities and targets set for it by Treasury Ministers? As it is now 13 months since the last case of foot and mouth, and seven months since the action plan was introduced, will her Department undertake to tackle the question of illegal imports with a much greater sense of importance, energy and urgency than it has hitherto demonstrated?

Does the Secretary of State appreciate the irony of the Government saying that it is impossible to have 100 per cent. security at our ports while continuing to insist—through their continued insistence on the 20-day rule on livestock movements—that farmers provide a 100 per cent. safeguard against the spread of disease? Does she understand that many livestock farmers now face a

stark choice: either they break the law, or they obey it and risk going out of business? Does she recall that both the Royal Society and Dr. Anderson called for urgent and detailed risk assessments and cost-benefit analyses to be carried out? Will she tell the House why we now have to wait until next February or even later for the results of those Government studies that ought to have been commissioned and undertaken a great deal earlier? Farmers are going out of business now; they cannot afford to wait many months more, as the Government seem to expect them to do.

I want to question the Secretary of State about the issues of stock valuation and disease insurance, which were tucked away at the end of the Government's document published this afternoon. The Government describe these areas as work still in progress, but will the right hon. Lady give us an indication of the time scale for decisions on these important matters? Will she give an assurance that she will not try to short-change farmers over compensation—for example, over compensation for the real value of breeding stock that is the fruit of a great deal of effort, sometimes put in over generations to build up a pedigree flock or herd? Farmers often look for a return on such investment over a number of years.

On insurance, do the Government recognise that the level of any disease insurance premium will depend not only on what a farmer does, but on what the market judges to be the effectiveness or otherwise of measures undertaken by the Government, and especially on the market's judgment of the efficacy of the Government's control of the illegal import of meat, given that, in their analysis, that was the cause of last year's epidemic?

Whenever possible, we will try to support the Government in their response to these important inquiries. After our experience last year, however, I believe that both Parliament and the industry will judge the Government not on the promises that they make but on the effectiveness of the measures that they deliver.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman asked how long we thought the study on vaccination would take. I believe that Sir Brian Follett thought that it would be at least 18 months before we could get an assessment of what progress we could make. As to how that relates to the new directive, I have already sent Commissioner Byrne a copy of the Government's response, and drawn to his attention this particular aspect of it so as to encourage discussion of the matter in the European Union.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of the freedom of local decision making. I accept that concerns were raised about that in some circumstances, although it is not my recollection that it was a major concern. We believe that the process of discussion and trial of the contingency plans that we are now developing will clarify some of those issues and help us to resolve them, so as to obtain the best balance between consistent decision making, which will tackle disease, and decision making where it is most effective.

The hon. Gentleman made a point about how much of the document is devoted to communications; I remind him that a lot of the inquiry report is devoted to communications. That relates, in part at least, to his point about freedom of local decision, which is regarded as a key issue that the Government should address.

The hon. Gentleman suggests that what the Government have done so far is belated and has made little difference. I take his point about the fact that travellers coming to and through the UK, particularly returning British travellers, perhaps do not all see some of the evidence, but I can tell him from my own observations that it is certainly the case that there is a great deal more publicity today than hitherto. It is also the case that, over the summer, the Government ran a publicity campaign entitled "Don't bring back more than you bargained for", and there is action through our embassies to ensure that people who apply for visas are given advice.

I have already mentioned our lobbying of the Commission to ensure that bringing in personal imports is now prohibited, and we have increased and are increasing funding at a number of ports to try to encourage enforcement as well as much more effective intelligence sharing on those issues. However, may I remind the hon. Gentleman that, if I recall correctly, the Select Committee suggested that it was reasonably impressed by the speed with which the Government acted on that front?

The hon. Gentleman also talked about movements, but I am not entirely sure what is his position and that of his party. I accept that there is a delicate balance to be struck, so I am not being entirely critical, although he is rather asking for it. The fact is that the inquiry reports both said that the 20-day rule should stay in place unless and until the Government have a detailed risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis. I accept that everybody would like to have them the day after tomorrow, but, if they are to be detailed, thorough and pertinent, we have—*[Interruption.]* We commissioned the work immediately, contrary to the implication of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. We must carry out a proper assessment.

I understand that Sir Brian Follett, for example, said as late as yesterday evening that there is a need for quarantine stops. I know that this is a matter of concern to the industry—I understand and accept that—and we did and we shall consider it as sympathetically as we can, but we cannot ignore either the scientific and veterinary advice or, indeed, the advice of both reports on which I am replying to the House.

There is a working party on valuation and disease insurance, which is discussing those matters with the industry, although it is in its early stages. Exactly the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised on the balance between a more standard approach to valuation, which has been the subject of some criticism, and recognising the needs of particular herds and flocks are being considered.

Andrew George (St. Ives): I, too, am grateful for the courtesy of having advance notice of the statement and the background document. We regret the Government's failure to hold a public inquiry, as they may have found it a good opportunity to test for the existence of a human disease that was running in parallel with foot and mouth. I refer, of course, to benefit of hindsight disease, the symptoms of which are brass neck and short-term memory loss. It is important that we move forward and consider ways of learning lessons from what was a tragic experience for the countryside.

[Andrew George]

On that basis, I welcome the Government's concession on meat import controls and their acceptance, finally, of the Liberal Democrat amendment to the Animal Health Bill. However, what efforts will the Department make to ensure that the chances of illegal meat importation are measurably reduced? A number of questions have been asked already, but how do we measure those changes and improvements that the Government have committed themselves to achieving?

The Secretary of State said that the Government accept virtually all the Anderson report's detailed recommendations, but can she present the House with a timetable for implementing those recommendations? It is great to have the acceptance, but we need a clear indication of how long implementation will take. What action will she take to address the view expressed by Dr. Iain Anderson that

"A reappraisal of prevailing attitudes and behaviours within the Department would"

benefit the climate of decision taking?

What discussions has the Department had with the farming industry about the proposed review of the 20-day rule on movement restrictions? It would be good if the review was completed as quickly as possible. As the Secretary of State probably knows, anxiety is growing in the farming communities.

If the Department is considering farm insurance schemes to share the costs of any possible future outbreaks of animal disease, what discussions has the Secretary of State had with the insurance industry? Is the proposal still under active consideration?

I note that the Secretary of State's friend Lord Haskins has been making his customary attacks on farmers. Will she tell us whether her Department has a genuine joined-up policy on food from plough to plate, given that farmers are receiving a decreasing proportion of the final consumer price? She must know that the British countryside will be turned over to prairie and ranch if Lord Haskins is let loose on the farming community. How many more thousands of farmers will be forced out of business before she and Lord Haskins are satisfied?

Margaret Beckett: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. I was not sure what he meant by his first point, however. I must confess with deep sorrow that I do not precisely recall the detail of all the Liberal Democrat amendments to the Animal Health Bill, but if what the hon. Gentleman said about meat import controls related to imports for personal use, I must tell him that this is not a Government concession. We have discussed it, and have pressed the European Union to adopt it as an EU rule. We are delighted that the Commissioner has agreed that the present practice should stop.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the timetable for implementation. As he probably recalls, there are about 100 recommendations, and I cannot give a timetable for all of them. I can tell him, however, that when he has a chance to look through the detailed schedule containing the various recommendations and responses, he will gain an impression of where the balance lies. I can also tell him that the Department intends to establish a work programme to show how we are dealing with the different issues, some of which require international action and consultation.

The hon. Gentleman asked about reappraisal of attitudes and behaviours in the Department. A substantial programme of change is under way in DEFRA, and we are consulting other Government agencies such as the Office of Public Service Reform. That has been proceeding for some time.

We are indeed discussing the issue of animal movements with the farming industry. As I have said, we hope and expect to receive some interim indications by the end of the month. We will not have the full report before the new year, but we hope we shall have it in time to look at what the overall regime should be.

I cannot add much to what I have already said about insurance, but we should bear in mind that Lord Haskins is a farmer himself. I think he would strongly reject the notion that either of us wants to see British farming as a series of featureless prairies. I agree, however, that we must try to find ways of enabling the British farming community to secure a greater share of the wealth that accrues from the produce that they rear or grow. That is dealt with in the Curry report and in our response to it.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): As my right hon. Friend knows, the situation was dealt with much more quickly north of the border. That is because local authorities went into action speedily with emergency planning procedures. I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments about local authorities; I hope she will impress on them the need for regular updates on contingency plans, and desktop exercises in relation to such procedures.

There is heavy emphasis on illegal imports. That problem worries us all, but Conservative Members seem to be suffering from selective amnesia. There was a combination of factors: there was an illegal import, but there was also a farmer who did not prepare swill properly. That should never be forgotten. May I also say that there has been a significant cost, not only in terms of heartbreak, but in terms of finance. We need to look at insurance. This is about plough to plate and the food chain. It is not about hobby farming, which cost us significantly in terms of compensation to many farmers.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the Secretary of State replies, I should say that I certainly want brief questions. There is no way that I can get through the list of hon. Members unless they ask brief questions.

Margaret Beckett: Of course I take my hon. Friend's point about the need for greater co-operation and rehearsal with local authorities. That is very much part of the purpose of the rehearsal and training that we intend to undertake in future.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The right hon. Lady is a frequent flier, often over some quite long distances, so she will know that it is entirely possible to pass through a British airport without any sight of the

sign warning against illegal imports. The carousels where passengers wait for their baggage are the most obvious places to put the signs, yet they are entirely innocent of such signs. Now that we have a co-ordinated service, will she please make sure that the signs are where passengers can see them, not decorating the back of the arrivals hall where nobody has the time or would think to look at them?

Margaret Beckett: I entirely accept the right hon. Gentleman's point about the carousels. We have been endeavouring to work with the airlines and to encourage them to do more to remind people in-flight about illegal imports and to take other related action. I hope and anticipate that much more will be done to combat illegal imports as I share the right hon. Gentleman's view that it is important that people understand that they must not act illegally in that respect.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree with me that the real lesson to be learned is never again should we have the disaster that affected Cumbria and other parts of the United Kingdom last year. Nowhere in the EU should people have to suffer as we did. Is not the only way to do that to develop a vaccine and use it routinely? My right hon. Friend said that such a vaccination programme was a long way away, but my understanding is that it could be introduced within 18 months, given the resources. When we have that vaccine, whenever that is, will it be the Government's policy to vaccinate all animals routinely?

Margaret Beckett: I share and understand my hon. Friend's concern for his constituents in Cumbria. There are two separate issues with regard to vaccination. The first relates to emergency vaccination that we hope will be available within some 18 months or so. It may be possible to get validated tests, for example, to distinguish between an animal that is infected and an animal that has been vaccinated, but that still requires some work. The other issue concerns the development of vaccines that could be used in an non-emergency. I fear that a routine prophylactic vaccination for every animal is a lot further away, because, as I think my hon. Friend will be aware, there is a plethora of different strains of the virus and up to now the international community has not shown much interest in such an enormous undertaking. However, I can assure him that the Government are taking seriously the advice of the Royal Society that it is something that we should encourage the international community to re-examine and I have already written to this effect.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): May I start with a quick plug for Herefordshire tourism at the Britain visitor centre? One of the subjects discussed there this morning was the disastrous foot and mouth outbreak, so I am pleased that the three points that the Minister identified—systems, speed of response and the necessity for good science—are in the statement.

On the issue of systems, can the Secretary of State tell us whether people who are wandering around in the countryside will also be in some way responsible for contributing to the biosecurity that farmers will need in order to avoid this disease, should it ever break out again? In terms of speed of response, Dr. Anderson identified the qualifications of veterinary surgeons as being key. Can the Secretary of State explain why, during the summer, after Dr. Anderson reported, there was an embargo on hiring state vets? On the necessity for good science, the gamma inteferon blood test that is currently available for bovine tuberculosis is not being used or trialled yet. Perhaps the Secretary of State might bring that about shortly.

Margaret Beckett: If I may, I shall begin where the hon. Gentleman ended. I believe that a pilot scheme is currently examining that issue, and we hope—

Hon Members: Where?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): It is being rolled out.

Margaret Beckett: The scheme is being rolled out. *[Interruption.]* I shall write to the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on the matter, as I am afraid that the geographical location of the pilot scheme is not present in my mind.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the general issue of biosecurity, and we accept that there is a need to remind everyone of the importance of behaving with caution and common sense. On vets and speed of response, unfortunately there was something of a hiatus in recruitment in the summer. Frankly, after all the expenditure of the past year or so, we ran out of money. However, I can assure him that the problem is being overcome.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Does the report state that never again will we see piles of animals being burned or even buried, usually in the wrong place? We witnessed such scenes during the foot and mouth crisis, and many constituents were very concerned about the smell, and about the burying of animals beside streams and schools. Does the report make it clear that such things will never happen again?

Margaret Beckett: I of course accept that distress was caused by the action that had to be undertaken during the outbreak. I did not go into detail about everything in the reports, but I know that Dr. Anderson considered whether there were hazards from such burials. He said that there was no evidence of that, but I fully accept that there is a difference between actual hazards and people experiencing great discomfort and unpleasantness. As a result of reassessment of the handling of the last outbreak, the hierarchy of steps taken in respect of disposal—beginning with commercial incineration and proceeding to rendering—is different from that which applied last time. That means that the issues that my hon. Friend has raised should not, we hope, ever need to be raised again.

David Burnside (South Antrim): If the Secretary of State were to fly into Belfast international airport, in my constituency, she would find out immediately how the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development brands livestock and produce to stop illegal food imports. That is carried out professionally and well, and we would like to offer that lesson to the rest of the

[David Burnside]

United Kingdom. Can the Secretary of State give the House some more details on policing resources, which is a major concern? She referred in her statement to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise getting more resources. We in Northern Ireland have a land border, which poses a greater problem than that on the mainland, and the policing of foot and mouth is absolutely crucial. Will she also give the House some information on the reason why very few prosecutions were brought after the foot and mouth outbreak? The two cases in Northern Ireland—in Armagh and the glens of Antrim—resulted from the illegal transfer of animals from the British mainland. Prosecutions were brought but no convictions were achieved.

Margaret Beckett: I am afraid that I do not know the answer to the hon. Gentleman's last question. Obviously, the issue of who is prosecuted, and under what circumstances, is a matter not for me but for the relevant authorities. However, I shall inquire as to whether any general information is available that I can give to him.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the additional resources that are being provided, to which I have already referred. Some £1.5 million is funding additional enforcement officers at ports and airports. That funding began in October, and is being provided for a number of ports and airports across the United Kingdom, so we are beginning to step up our policing efforts. Of course, we took some relevant action earlier, such as increasing the powers of enforcement officers.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): May I raise with the Minister what I believe to be a major omission from her report? One of the most worrying and upsetting elements of the crisis was the way in which some saw the opportunity for price gouging and fraud. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that any fraud in future events is thoroughly punished? What steps has she taken to ensure that price gouging is avoided? What is she doing to tackle the culture of milking the system, which is so prevalent in agriculture?

Margaret Beckett: I accept my hon. Friend's concerns. I am aware of the vigour with which he and other hon. Members raise those issues on the Public Accounts Committee. All I can say to him is that we are looking very carefully at what is being said about those issues and we look forward to the report from the PAC, as well as that from the National Audit Office. Perhaps "looking forward" is not quite the right phrase, but we are certainly in anticipation of them. That is very much the background to some of the issues that are being and have been discussed about how we handle the valuation issue in future.

May I also add for the information of the House that I am advised that there are definitely posters about illegal imports on the carousels at terminal 2, Heathrow?

Mr. James Paice (South-West Cambridgeshire): May I congratulate the Minister on her statement that it is impossible to guarantee that any situation is 100 per cent. risk free? I hope that that heralds a change in attitude for the whole Government because it would save the House a tremendous amount of time legislating. Given that that is the case, as she rightly says, may I emphasise to her that whether there are labels on carousels in terminal 2 is actually a small point, although my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) was right to make it? However, countless travellers, including myself and some of her hon. Friends, who flew into Heathrow direct from central Africa about three weeks ago not only did not see any notice, but did not even see a Customs officer when we went through Customs control. There was no way that anyone would have been able to stop or deal with us if one of us had been transgressing. May I also repeat the point that was made earlier—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. May I ask the hon. Gentleman to be brief?

Mr. Paice: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I simply want to reinforce the point about the number of officers required to police our efforts: £1.5 million is very welcome, but the right hon. Lady knows that it is not a large number when translated into people. We need to match what other countries have in terms of the number people policing imports into our country.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman may not have seen the information or the warnings, but I reiterate that our embassies and consulates have been giving out warnings, particularly to people applying for visas. We have been pressing the airlines to use some of the material that we are producing. Very recently, I received an e-mail from west Africa from someone saying, "Congratulations. I have just come through the airport"—wherever it was—"and seen the right kind of warnings. It is about time, and it never happened before."

I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's question about why he did not see any Customs officers when he last came through the airport, but may I observe, without prejudice, that, of course, the fact that he could not see them does not mean that they could not see him?

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The Secretary of State has made it clear that, in the event of a major outbreak, there will be no blanket closure of footpaths. Is not one of the important lessons to be learned the value of visitors to the countryside in terms of their contribution to the local rural economy? Against that background, will she quicken her efforts to switch payments to farmers from subsidises on production to payments to farmers who lift the landscape, enhance the environment and encourage visitors into the countryside?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the fact that the outbreak brought home to people the value of access to the countryside and the contribution that visitors make to the countryside, but it brought home to a lot of people just how much they valued their access, and there was a welcome resurgence of visits to the English countryside and tourism spots in the United Kingdom.

Secondly, my hon. Friend asks whether I can quicken the process. I do not know about that, but I assure him that we are pursuing CAP reform with all the vigour at

our command. Although I have not seen the assessment on which the figure is based, I recently heard the chief executive of the Environment Agency observe that, in her judgment, it was possible that farmers were contributing environmental benefit and improvement to our economy to the tune of some £900 million, and that they were not being reimbursed for it.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): What is the Secretary of State doing about Dr. Anderson's recommendation that there should be research into compensation for communities where mass burial has taken place? What is she doing to dispel the impression that, although the authorities could find Widdrington in my constituency pretty quickly when they had more than 100,000 carcases to bury, they are not sure where it is now?

Margaret Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that Dr. Anderson suggested that we research the issue of compensation, although I believe that that was in international context. Some work on that is being undertaken.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): As a fellow Derbyshire MP, my right hon. Friend will know that High Peak escaped the direct effects of foot and mouth, but that there were indirect effects on farming and tourism. As a result, the measures that she has announced today, especially those to do with rights of way, will be welcome. I talk to my farmers regularly. They have expressed concerns about the 20-day standstill, but I believe that they know in their hearts why that is necessary, and why the industry is being asked to play its part.

However, other hon. Members will recognise the message that my farmers give to me, which is that the restrictions on imports—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will get to the point of his question.

Mr. Levitt: Is there not a political imperative to ensure that imports are controlled—and seen to be so—as well as to put in place the practical imperatives that my right hon. Friend has described?

Margaret Beckett: I recognise the concern that my hon. Friend expresses. It will be interesting to see what the risk assessment on this issue produces, although I am pretty confident that it will say that illegal imports pose a risk. However, we shall have to see what balance should be struck between personal imports and bulk imports made illegally. One feels a natural revulsion at many of the personal imports that one hears about, and the introduction of the new procedures has increased protection. However, there are questions about how easy it is for a personal import of that sort to get so far that it is likely to be in contact with a susceptible animal. Illegal bulk imports are perhaps a greater risk, but I have not seen the result of the risk assessment, and that is exactly the sort of issue that it must address.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Given the comments made by Sir Brian Follett to the Select Committee, will the Secretary of State say what work is to be done to improve understanding of the pathways of disease spread for diseases such as foot and mouth? That understanding is needed if we are to develop better on-farm biosecurity measures. Also, what is the right hon. Lady doing to deal with the fact that Britain still faces a threat from diseases such as West Isle fever, another problem pointed out by Sir Brian? What is being done to counter other major threats of animal disease?

Margaret Beckett: First, consideration of such matters is very much part of the animal health strategy. I accept what the right hon. Gentleman has said, and I must say that I had no idea of the range of diseases to which animals are prone until I had the good fortune to occupy this post. Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned Sir Brian Follett's recommendations about studies of disease, a matter that I touched on in my opening remarks. Our new chief scientific adviser, with the assistance of the new board appointed to support him, is undertaking a thorough review of all the Department's work. That will involve a thorough reassessment of priorities, and the right hon. Gentleman has identified exactly the sort of matter that will be looked at.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): The Secretary of State will know that the independent inquiries held in Cumbria and Northumberland made some important recommendations based on experience on the front line. Why will she not give a formal response to those reports?

Margaret Beckett: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, we gave a broad general response. Certainly those reports were fed in and enlightened the course of the other inquiries. It is just not possible to go through all the inquiries in the degree of detail that would be required.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will the Secretary of State say a little more about the assessment that she is making of the 20-day rule for animal movements? Will that assessment take into account alternative strategies, particularly, for example, thorough animal movement recording as an alternative to the 20-day rule, which is very injurious to farmers in my constituency in west Wales?

Buried in the back of the document is a reference to the Government's response to lessons learned no. 37 in which the right hon. Lady says that she is in discussion with the National Assembly for Wales regarding the devolution of further powers on animals to the National Assembly. Will she support such moves if they prove to be equally or more efficacious than the present situation?

Margaret Beckett: On the hon. Gentleman's latter point, all I can say is that the discussion continues, but it is a very cordial one. On the 20-day rule, I am not carrying out the assessment—it is being carried out by the relevant bodies which are considering what alternatives could provide reassurance.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Can the Secretary of State give the House regular updates on vaccination? I think that she said that it may be at least 18 months

[Mr. John Greenway]

before a vaccination is available, but we would like to know what progress is being made on testing the vaccines.

On the 20-day standstill period, notwithstanding what she has said and what the two reports recommended, she will know that there will be huge disappointment among livestock farmers that there appears to be no progress on this. When will the risk analysis and the cost-benefit analysis be concluded? Livestock farmers need some certainty because they have to plan their businesses too.

Margaret Beckett: I understand that great disappointment will be felt, and I understand that many people in livestock farming simply wish the Government to abandon all movement controls. However, I say to the hon. Gentleman in all sincerity, given the strong recommendations of the Royal Society inquiry as well as of the lessons learned inquiry that we do no such thing, that I am afraid that the Government did not feel that it would be responsible to take such steps. We have made some minor amendments and exemptions, as he knows, to try to take account of some of the concerns about the movement of breeding stock. However disappointed people may be, I hope that they will understand why we did not feel able simply to abandon the restrictions. We hope that we will have some preliminary results by the end of the month, although we do not expect the full report until into the new year. Of course we will endeavour to keep the House informed about vaccination but I am not sure whether it is as simple as saying every so often that we will have a report on progress.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Now that the right hon. Lady has had a chance to study the reports that she commissioned, what, in her judgment, was the cause of last year's outbreak?

Margaret Beckett: Someone acted illegally in importing diseased meat and someone else acted illegally in not reporting the incidence of foot and mouth disease and in allowing movement, which meant that the disease was spread. If blame there is, that is where it lies.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): First, may I say how much I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that Her Majesty's Customs and Excise will now be given sole responsibility for the control of animal and animal health products at ports and airports? I have long advocated that approach, and I am glad that it has been accepted by the Government. There remains the issue of what priority Customs and Excise will give that responsibility and what resources will be made available to them to carry it out.

Margaret Beckett: We are discussing increased resources with Customs and Excise. Responsibility for the material remains with DEFRA, but import controls will be the responsibility of Customs and Excise, and I feel sure that they will give the matter the priority that it deserves. That is, in part, something to which Members of the House might turn their attention.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): May I join my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) in welcoming most of what the right hon. Lady has said? Given the criticisms contained in the Anderson report in particular and the flurry of activity that it has engendered, does she still maintain, as she once said, that the Government's response to foot and mouth had been a minor triumph? Or will she take possibly the last opportunity—that I will offer her anyway—to apologise and say sorry for the trauma of foot and mouth?

Margaret Beckett: I made it plain following the publication of the Anderson report that the Government accept that mistakes were made. I also made it plain, as Dr. Anderson's report clearly shows, that a huge effort was undertaken to try to bring the disease under control. Dr. Anderson has previously identified the huge amount of utterly devoted work by staff in my Department and many others across the country. He pointed out:

"many farmers, local people and government officials made heroic efforts to fight this disease and limit its effects. Through their efforts it was finally overcome and eradicated after 221 days, one day less than the epidemic of 1967–68."

Given the unprecedented nature of the outbreak, that was an achievement. If I used the words "minor triumph", it was against the background of ferocious and unjustified criticism of staff in the field, not least staff in my Department.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Do the Government's contingency plans include the ability in an emergency to introduce a welfare cull? Does the right hon. Lady accept that they should, and that a welfare cull with fair compensation should be able to function swiftly and efficiently in the early days of an emergency?

Margaret Beckett: It is our hope that there will never again have to be a welfare cull. One aim of the trialling and the work that is being undertaken is try to ensure that we do not find ourselves in circumstances where such a thing has to be contemplated.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Having flown earlier this year from Ascension Island near equatorial Africa into a British airport and entered the country without speaking to a single human being, and having yesterday spent several hours with Customs and Excise at Dover seeing what it does, I am not persuaded that the Government's recently announced publicity campaign has got any traction. Is the Secretary of State aware that the main priorities of Customs and Excise are tobacco, alcohol and class A drugs? Does she accept that while the inclusion in the statement of a ban on personal imports was extremely welcome—although the fact that she has to ask Commissioner Byrne for permission is deeply offensive—what is required is a fundamental step-change in the understanding and psychology of people travelling to this country such as that which occurs when people go to Australia and the United States? Much more is needed, and soon.

Margaret Beckett: I can only repeat that there are posters at Heathrow, regional airports and other international airports. Some 20 international airlines have now agreed to distribute leaflets, either in-flight or at check-in desks and information points—I assure the hon. Gentleman that that has taken some work—and

we are looking at other outlets for distributing leaflets, including high street travel agents, vaccination centres and regional post offices. I have mentioned already the advice that visitors get. A radio filler has been distributed to 118 regional commercial radio stations and a couple of campaign videos are due to be distributed soon. A great deal of work is therefore under way, much of which has to done through other people and agencies, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to pursue it.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I welcome the Secretary of State's remarks about the responsibilities of Customs and Excise, but will she make the point to her colleagues in the Treasury that that work needs to be done in uncanalised routes of entry as much as at Dover and the airports? What steps is she taking to enable farmers to take their animals to slaughter locally instead of being forced by supermarkets to drag them halfway across the country?

Margaret Beckett: I take the hon. Gentleman's point about the implications of various movements, but I believe that he is talking about commercial contracts, and I am not in a position to interfere with them.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The right hon. Lady will be aware that foot and mouth came late to the Vale of York and that the strongest criticism in the Anderson inquiry concerned the question of a contingency plan. What message can I take back to my farmers to satisfy them that there is a contingency plan for North Yorkshire? Will the right hon. Lady assure them that the high standards of animal biosecurity that apply to everyone else will apply to her own Department? A picture of her departmental colleague, Lord Whitty, appeared in our local newspaper on the same day as an advertisement saying that waterproof overall trousers and wellington boots must be worn, but he was visibly wearing neither.

Margaret Beckett: I am afraid that I am not familiar with the episode to which the hon. Lady refers, nor do I know where that photograph is supposed to have been taken. One of the less attractive features of the desperate attempt to make all of this stick to the Government was the pretence in some quarters that the disease was spread by officials from the Ministry rather than by the type of movement that actually led to its spread.

I realise that it is not much help to say that the contingency plan is available on the website—but it is. We shall of course look for other ways to make it available. The most important thing that we want and need from the hon. Lady's constituents and anyone else with relevant experience is their input to that contingency plan. It is a living document on which we shall continually be carrying out much more training, trialling and rehearsal. What we need most is the input of practitioners in the field to identify the weaknesses before there are any further animal disease outbreaks, not after.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): On behalf of my farmers and constituents, who are deeply concerned, I endorse all the points made about the 20-day rule. The Secretary of State will have noticed that paragraph 4.6.3 of the report observes that the Government do not rule out the possibility of on-farm burial. My constituency was the epicentre of the 1967 epidemic in which there was an enormous amount of on-farm burial, yet there were no after-effects for any animal or person, nor any type of crop distress that proved that infection had resulted. I would recommend burial on farm. How does the right hon. Lady reconcile that possibility with the EU directive that her Government are intent on implementing that would stop on-farm burial in all circumstances from 2003, as a result of the concerns of the Environment Agency?

Margaret Beckett: The phraseology of the report shows that, at present, there are circumstances in which on-farm burial could not be ruled out if it was necessary. It is not a preferred option. The hon. Gentleman knows that there were, and would be, environmental considerations, such as the level of the water table. One thing that was often left out of the discussions of the impact of on-farm burial during the period of the disease outbreak was that we must now take account of the aftermath of BSE.

BILL PRESENTED

Energy-Saving Materials (Reduced Rate Of Vat)

Ms Julia Drown, supported by Dr. Brian Iddan, Mr. Paul Truswell, Tom Brake, Alan Simpson, Brian White, Vera Baird, Norman Lamb, Peter Bottomley, Mr. Simon Thomas, Clive Efford and Joan Walley, presented a Bill to reduce the rate of Value Added Tax levied on the supply of energy-saving materials and the cost of their installation; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 206].

Single European Language

4.33 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to make proposals to the European Council for the establishment of one language as the official language of the European Union; to provide for the development of a single European language; and to establish a date by which the language will become the official language of the United Kingdom.

I have promoted a number of ten-minute Bills over the years. My mind goes back to an occasion in 1979 when I promoted a Bill immediately before Margaret Thatcher, as she then was, moved a motion of confidence in the Government. The good news was that my Bill undoubtedly had the widest audience of any ten-minute Bill in the history of this House; many millions of people watched me live on television introducing my Bill. I did a deal with the Government: if I kept my ten-minute Bill down to three sentences, they would give me what I wanted—pensions for 25,000 service widows. This is a rather different occasion, and the audience for this Bill is more like the normal audience for such Bills.

My starting point is a concern about language differences in the European Union, which are a barrier to communication and trade. As the European Union has sought to deal with the barrier of currency between nations, so it is appropriate for it to address the barrier of language between nations.

It is in the European Union institutions that the problem is the most exposed. There are 11 recognised languages and, currently, the rules of the EU say that any citizen has the right to communicate with any European institution in any recognised language and to receive a reply in the same language. As the Commission has said, linguistic diversity is an essential aspect of the common cultural heritage; in other words, "We agree to differ."

The formula for calculating the number of language combinations within the EU is "n squared minus n" where "n" is the number of languages in question. If we have 11 languages, that is "11 squared minus 11", making 110 language combinations in the EU at the moment. The addition of one extra language would take the number of language combinations from 110 to 132.

The EU spends about £150 million on translation and interpretation; it has about 1,200 full-time interpreters, 600 support staff and about 2,000 contract staff. Their work is to translate about 1.25 million pages that go in the 40-truck convoy that makes its way monthly from Strasbourg to Brussels to Luxembourg.

That is the present situation. As the EU expands, as is planned, and if the number of official languages goes, as is expected, from 11 to 23, the number of language combinations would increase from 110 to 506. Translation and interpretation would more than double—way more. Even if relay languages were used—for instance, translating Greek into English into Estonian, or Slovakian into French into Spanish—the work would be way greater than the total translation resources would bear. We cannot go on like this. For some of the smaller countries, the number of recognised interpreters is quite small. We should be addressing ourselves to the language problem. Our search will logically start in finding the most-used language in the world and perhaps building on that.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Tell us what that is.

Mr. Viggers: It is certainly not Welsh. It is, in fact, Mandarin Chinese, used as a first language by 874 million people. However, not even all the Chinese use Mandarin. I remember meeting a Chinaman once and greeting him "Ni hao ma"; he replied, memorably, "I am sorry. I do not speak Mandarin."

The second most popular first language in the world is Hindi, at 366 million, but that is not much help either. The third language, English—at 341 million—has the advantage of being the first language in 104 countries, which is more than twice as many as the second most popular first language. Adopting English as the official language would reduce the number of language combinations from 110 to 10 and, on expansion, would reduce the number to 22 from 506.

It would be very good if I could sit down at that point, having done my job, and say that English should be the language of the EU, but enormous issues of national pride are involved. First, it is a principle of the EU that all languages are equal and, secondly, the chances of persuading the French to give up French as the second de facto drafting language in the EU must be assessed realistically as zero.

We must look for a European solution, and here we have a precedent to guide us. The EU faced up to a similar problem with its currencies. Instead of choosing the strongest and most widely used currency, the deutschmark—as one would have thought was natural—it chose to create something new and artificial called the euro. Following that precedent, it would be logical to create a European language, which I call Eural.

To those who say that that is fanciful, I say that I agree. But is it any more fanciful than what we have now: a single currency that depends critically upon a stability and growth pact that is ignored by the leading countries and which the President of the Commission refers to as stupid? I think that I am justified in following my fancy for a moment to see where it leads us.

Eural would, of course, be created as an artificial language. If we are scrapping the language of Shakespeare, it is only reasonable to scrap the languages of Voltaire, Dante, Lorca and the rest. Before we enter Eural, however, we would have to produce five tests to decide how and when we join. Clearly, those tests would be artificial, very general and subjective to allow the Government to decide when we join the Eural. We would, of course, need a Minister to decide who should administer the five tests, and who would be better than the Deputy Prime Minister, who speaks in virtual Eural already? I could give a large number of examples, but I shall read a transcript of just one of his speeches:

"Our objectives are clear . . . The objectives remain the same and indeed it has been made clear by the Prime Minister in a speech yesterday that the objectives are clear. And the one about the removal of the Taliban is not something we have as a clear objective"—

there was prolonged laughter at that point—

"but it is possibly a consequence that will flow from the Tallybin clearly giving protection to bin Laden and the UN resolution made it absolutely clear that anyone that finds them in that position declares themselves an enemy and that clearly is a matter for these objectives."

I think we see the thrust of that. He is the man who said in a newspaper interview:

"The Green Belt is a Labour achievement, and we mean to build on it".

Eural will have significant value when it comes to Government promises, as, again, the Deputy Prime Minister said in 1997 and repeated in 1998:

"I will have failed if in five years' time there are not far fewer journeys by car. It's a tall order, but I urge you to hold me to it."

Similarly, a junior Minister in the Home Office who referred to a target of deporting 30,000 failed asylum seekers a year went on to say that

"a target is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. It is a driver."

Furthermore, when the former Secretary of State for Education was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) whether she would resign if the Government did not reach their literacy and numeracy targets by 2002, she replied:

"Of course I will. Indeed, I generously commit the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), too. We speak with one voice."

Apparently, the time had gone when

"a Secretary of State would promise to resign but the rest of the team would not go too."—[*Official Report, House of Commons,* 2 March 1999; Vol. 326, c. 948.]

Of course, not only did he not go, but he was promoted to her job.

The use of less precise language will save the Government and the nation from the humiliation of promises being broken without any shame or regret. Eural might therefore appeal to this Government if not to anyone else. My plea, of course, is for greater use of English. If that fails, however, the alternative should be considered. For all those reasons, although not with any great confidence that my Bill will become law in the short time remaining in the Session, I commend my Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Peter Viggers.

SINGLE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE

Mr. Peter Viggers accordingly presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to make proposals to the European Council for the establishment of one language as the official language of the European Union; to provide for the development of a single European language; and to establish a date by which the language will become the official language of the United Kingdom: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Thursday 7 November, and to be printed [Bill 207].

ANIMAL HEALTH BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order (28 June 2001),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Animal Health Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 12th November 2001:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion six hours after their commencement or at Ten o'clock, whichever is later.

2. Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the Table below and shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) in accordance with the second column of that Table.

Amendments	*Time for conclusion*
1 to 12	1½ hours after commencement
13 to 45	3½ hours after commencement
14 to 44	5 hours after commencement
46 to 74	6 hours after commencement or Ten o'clock, whichever is later

Subsequent stages

3.—(1) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill shall be considered forthwith without any Question put.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—[*Mr. Morley.*]

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Animal Health Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I must draw the attention of the House to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 5, 7, 11, 45, 47 and 49, which are to be considered today. If the House agrees to these Lords amendments, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Clause 1

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 1, line 3, at end insert—

"( ) In the Animal Health Act 1981 (c.22) (in this Act referred to as the 1981 Act)

before paragraph 3 of Schedule 3 insert—

"(2A) The Secretary of State shall give priority to a "vaccinate to live" policy prior to causing to be slaughtered animals on premises where no infection has been detected.""

4.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Government amendment (a) in lieu and sub-amendment (i).

Mr. Morley: The House has discussed the Bill in detail. I said that as a result of pertinent points raised in Committee we would give further consideration to amendments, especially in the other place.

Significant changes have been made to the Bill. We accepted some of them as a result of discussions in the course of the parliamentary process, and I want to pay tribute to my colleague, Lord Whitty, who did a good job in dealing with the Bill in the House of Lords. Other changes result from commitments that we gave in Committee to consider certain aspects in further detail so that we could be more transparent. We also wanted to reassure hon. Members and reflect their reasonable concerns.

Amendment No. 1 deals with vaccination. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear in her statement that we accept the recommendations of the Anderson and Follett reports that vaccination should have a more prominent role in the decision-tree process of the measures that we would apply to combat any disease outbreak. That commitment has been given. It is also recognised in our revised interim contingency plan, which is being made public today. It is part of a developing contingency plan arising from discussions with the industry.

Although we understand the reason behind the amendment, we cannot accept it. As we made clear in our response to the reports, we will, ideally, want to use a vaccinate-to-live strategy if emergency vaccination is used. There may, however, be scenarios in which, following the appropriate veterinary and scientific advice, culling of non-infected premises is deemed more appropriate than vaccination. We do not want that advice to be restricted artificially in terms of the most appropriate disease control methods that could be applied.

It is also important to stress that European Union legislation requires slaughter of livestock on premises that have an epidemiological link to infected premises. For example, in some circumstances slaughter will not be the last resort, and we would want to stamp out an immediate outbreak by culling, as identified in the Royal Society and Anderson reports. The amendment therefore runs contrary to EU law. It is unworkable and we cannot accept it, even though we are not necessarily against the reason behind it.

We have offered a Government amendment in lieu. It has been carefully drafted to address concerns about the role of vaccination in future disease outbreaks. It sets out explicitly on the face of the Bill that the Secretary of State must consider

"the most appropriate means of preventing the spread of the disease."

In particular, the Secretary of State must consider whether vaccination is more appropriate in the circumstances. It is not entirely dissimilar to the amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats. I hope they recognise that we understand the reasoning behind their amendment. Although our amendment reflects concerns about restrictions, we are not against the general principle of recognising the changes in the Government's response and our acceptance of the recommendations in the Follett and Anderson reports. We want to emphasise that by putting it on the face of the Bill. Our approach also reflects the inquiry reports and recent European developments, which have underlined the need for vaccination to play a higher profile in future disease outbreaks. The Government response to the inquiry sets out our strategy for taking those recommendations forward.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the Minister explain the difference between what he now proposes to put on the face of the Bill and what de facto took place during the foot and mouth debacle? Back Benchers understood that Ministers were considering vaccination at various points.

Mr. Morley: That is true. We were considering vaccination at a number of points. Traditional methods of dealing with an outbreak on that scale, which were based on the inquiry into the 1967 outbreak, were based on mass culling. What is different about our response to the Anderson and Royal Society reports is that vaccination, which was on the periphery of the responses—we had not resolved many of the issues within the food industry or the agricultural, food and livestock sectors—had not been pushed up the order of priority as regards decision making. It was a specialist application, to be used in certain circumstances, and was considered on a number of occasions, as the hon. Gentleman rightly states.

The Anderson and Royal Society reports made it clear that stamping out should be the initial response, but that vaccination should go further up the agenda:

it should be considered right away, in the appropriate circumstances and the appropriate way, as a tool for controlling disease outbreaks. It is a different response, compared with previous contingency plans. That is reflected in our revised contingency plan and in what I am saying today about accepting the concerns about vaccination by putting it on the face of the Bill, which will allow us to take into account a range of options for what method is applied. Vaccination will, however, be more prominent in the decision-making process.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is it not true that in April 2001 the Government's advisers said that a large number of cattle in the north of England should be vaccinated, but the National Farmers Union, in the shape of Ben Gill, wrecked that decision? He insisted on laying down impossible conditions that could not be met. If the Bill becomes an Act, will it withstand any future wrecking tactics of the NFU?

Mr. Morley: In Cumbria, our scientific advisory group made a unanimous recommendation that vaccination should be used on cattle, more in relation to disposal than as a disease-control measure. Due to the nature and spread of the disease, the advantage of vaccination would have been to reduce the number of cattle killed and, therefore, the need to dispose of them. There is no denying that there was significant disagreement within the farming sector; concerns were also expressed in the food industry. We are trying to look forward rather than back. What is clear to me, as I have said, is that it is difficult to decide the role of vaccination, where to use it and the priority that it should have in disease-control strategies and response in the midst of one of the world's biggest epidemics. It is difficult to get that agreement. It is much better to debate that matter now, have proper contingency arrangements and reflect the change both in the Government's response to the independent inquiries and on the face of the Bill.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Does my hon. Friend accept that part of the problem is that there has to be some consensus about the actions that have to be taken? We all know what went wrong last time—there was a great deal of disagreement over policy and actions among farmers. How does he anticipate that we shall be able to reach a stage at which we at least share an understanding of the policy options? As he says, that cannot be done in the midst of an outbreak; it has to be done now, and we have to build that consensus. Is that what the Government are talking about?

Mr. Morley: I do not want to go into great detail about the various strategies, as that would divert attention from the amendments. However, I am happy to answer interventions from hon. Members on that point. There are still many issues in relation to vaccination that need to be resolved. It is not a simple matter. There are issues such as tests and acceptance by the livestock industry and the food and farming industry, but we want to engage all the stakeholders in discussions on the matter. There is a recommendation from the independent reports that vaccination be considered more prominently as a response. We are not being asked to use vaccination as a response in all circumstances. One of the problems with amendment No. 1 is that we need some flexibility, but we accept that vaccination must move up the agenda and that we must address and resolve a range of issues.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the problems during the epidemic was that there were announcements by the Government, but a long period elapsed before anything happened in the countryside to implement the announcements? There was a great deal of doubt and public agonising by the Government about which course of action to take. Professor Sir Brian Follett said that the contingency plan should outline clearly to all the stakeholders the various options and actions, but should culminate in parliamentary approval of a contingency plan. Would not that be the way of answering the point made by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), who seems to have disappeared? Farmers should know what the various scenarios are and the responses to them. It is not good enough to put the contingency plan on the website. We need to have sight of it and debate it publicly.

Mr. Morley: I do not disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. Part of our interim contingency plan is a decision tree, as it is called. One can see clearly the various circumstances and the decisions that one might take about whether or not to vaccinate and what sort of vaccination one might use—suppressive, preventive or ring vaccination. A range of issues and applications is clearly laid out in a decision tree.

We are still in the process of engaging stakeholders in the development of interim strategies, so that we can have a proper contingency plan in place, probably early in the new year. We very much welcome the scrutiny of bodies such as the Select Committee in the development of a plan, so that it is open and transparent and people understand the reasoning behind it and the options available.

We are, of course, developing a whole animal health strategy. We are discussing foot and mouth, but the Bill deals with animal health. Inevitably, a great deal of attention will be focused on foot and mouth, but we must think ahead as well. We need adequate contingency plans for a range of exotic diseases, some of which may represent an increased threat because of changes in climate and the spread of insect vectors, for example. The Bill is designed to cope with that and give us the flexibility that we will need in future.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I am grateful to the Minister, and apologise for the fact that I was not present when he started speaking. Does he recall that he told us in Committee:

"I want to make it clear to the Committee that vaccinate and slaughter is not an option that I personally support"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 4 December 2001; col. 171.]

and went on to explain how he preferred the option of vaccinating animals so that they could continue to live? Is that still his view, and will it influence the outcome of the consultations to which he referred?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Lady played a prominent part in Committee and she is welcome to intervene. The Secretary of State made it clear in her statement today

[Mr. Morley]

that, generally speaking, if we are going to use emergency vaccination our preference would be a vaccinate-to-live policy. There may be circumstances in which a vaccinate-to-kill-later policy was necessary. That is dealt with in the Bill in relation to compensation, for example, and we accepted some amendments on that. However, I can confirm categorically to the hon. Lady that our preference is for a policy of vaccinate to live.

I have made it clear why we cannot accept the point made in the Liberal Democrat amendments. However, I am sure that we are not very far apart in our reasoning. We have given an important commitment and I hope that the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) will accept that.

5 pm

We accept Lords amendment No. 3, which deals with the use of the word "immaterial". We are happy to accept the clarification that it provides. The provision in question enables the Secretary of State, where it is necessary to do so, to use a power to limit the spread of an outbreak and deal with it quickly. Our aim will be to use that power where we believe that it would reduce the total number—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the Minister that the Lords amendment to which he is speaking is in a separate group. At the moment, we are discussing Lords amendment No. 1, Government motion to disagree thereto and Government amendment (a) in lieu, and sub-amendment (i).

Mr. Morley: Thank you for that guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am used to dealing with amendments together in Committee and on Report. I do have much more to add.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I think that I was the only Labour Back Bencher who spoke in favour of the Bill on Second Reading. One of the reasons why I contributed was that it was vague as to whether the Government had the right compulsorily to vaccinate. Does the Bill before us clear that issue up?

Mr. Morley: The Bill makes the situation clear: the right to vaccinate always existed under the Animal Health Act 1981, but the Bill makes it easier to apply vaccination, as well as culling and serology, more quickly and efficiently.

There has been much concentration on the Bill in terms of culling—we had the same discussion in Committee—but the issues remain the same. The Bill does not focus entirely on culling. It is designed also to give the powers necessary for speedy entry into and application of vaccination and serology. Those powers are equally important in any application of disease control measures. Indeed, the different emphasis might mean that they become more important, which is a very strong argument for the Bill.

Andrew George (St. Ives): I seek the Minister's advice on the consumption of vaccinated meat. What assessment has his Department and the Food Standards Agency made of that issue? Is the Department clear about how much, if any, vaccinated meat is coming into the country?

Mr. Morley: We are certainly aware that some vaccinated meat is coming into the country, but vaccines are used in the livestock industry for all sorts of things. As is made clear in the Government's formal written response to the independent inquiries, we certainly believe that there is no reason why vaccinated meat, in this case in relation to foot and mouth disease, should not be placed on the market. There is no safety reason why that should not happen.

I ask the House to disagree with the amendment, but I hope that it will accept that we have recognised the arguments behind it and tried to give some reassurance by allowing in the Bill for the fact that the issue of vaccination will certainly be considered more prominently in future, along with a range of options, bearing in mind the proper scientific and veterinary advice and the fact that there are still some issues to resolve before we can successfully use it on a large scale.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I welcome the fact that the Minister has been ready to listen to all the discussions that occurred in Committee, in the House and during the progress of the Bill in the other place. His tabling of an amendment in lieu of the Lords amendment demonstrates that the Government are ready to listen. I understand the Minister's confusion about speaking to the other groups of amendments, but in those, too, the Government have demonstrated that they are ready to listen to the arguments that have been put forward here, in Committee and, particularly, in the other place, by granting a number of concessions on some of the important matters that were raised.

I understand much of what the Minister said about Lords amendment No. 1. None the less, we shall argue the case in favour of the amendment. The first groups of amendments—including those relating to slaughter, to which the Minister referred a moment ago—bring us to the heart of all that we found wrong with the Bill when it left the House of Commons. Its name is the Animal Health Bill, but as my noble Friend Baroness Byford so memorably said on Second Reading, it would have been better to call it the "Animal Death Bill".

The Bill was originally introduced to allow the Government to kill animals, whether or not there was a real need to do so and whether or not farmers were prepared to allow it to happen, and to give those farmers unfair compensation for the cull once it had happened. The groups of amendments in this first, one-and-a-half hour debate are designed to correct the Bill's asymmetrical imbalance in favour of death, and to create a Bill that is, wherever possible, in favour of life—a true Animal Health Bill. This remains a bad Bill, but, thanks to these amendments and to the others that we shall debate later, it is a slightly less bad Bill than it was when it left here. We therefore welcome the Government's readiness to accept their Lordships' amendments, which, if time allows, we shall debate later.

The amendments in the first group relate to the vaccinate-to-live policy. Rather than accepting them, the Government are seeking to water them down. The

Minister justified that by suggesting that, under EU law, vaccination on farms that had epidemiological connections with farms that were being culled out could not be allowed. I am certain that that is true, and I would not for a second question the Minister's understanding of EU law; I am sure that he is a great expert on it. However, many of the contiguous culls that took place during the crisis two years ago did not involve farms that were epidemiologically connected with farms being culled out. Rather, those farms simply happened to be next door to them. According to my understanding of the matter—I am ready to be corrected—EU law would allow vaccination on neighbouring farms.

What animal lover could have failed to be affected by the devastating images of the pyres of perfectly healthy animals, just two years ago? Who would not wish to find a way of avoiding that happening again? The unamended Lords amendment offers a means of doing exactly that. The Royal Society's report, which was published in July and to which the Government have rushed out their response today, acknowledges that fact. I remind the House that the report states:

"It is clear that the long-term solution is to develop a vaccine against FMD (and other diseases such as classical swine fever) that confers lifelong sterile immunity against all strains of the virus. An international research effort is required to develop such a vaccine."

On short-term planning, it states:

"Given recent advances in vaccine science and improved trading regulations, emergency vaccines should now be considered as part of the control strategy from the start of any outbreak of FMD. This means 'vaccination to live' rather than vaccination to prevent spread and then culling."

The Royal Society is, therefore, perfectly clear on the matter. In the National Farmers' Union's response to that report, its president, Mr. Ben Gill, said:

"The NFU supports the report's recommendation that emergency vaccination should be considered as an option alongside the slaughter of infected animals and dangerous contacts as part of an overall control strategy during any future FMD outbreak."

The Royal Society, the Follett report and the NFU support the principle of vaccination becoming part of the hierarchy of weapons at the Secretary of State's disposal in the event of another outbreak.

It might be informative to glance at the way in which Uruguay tackled foot and mouth disease in 2001, to see what can be done using vaccination without subsequent slaughter. Uruguay vaccinated 10 million cattle and eradicated the disease within 15 weeks. Only 7,000 animals were slaughtered, compared with the millions that were culled here, and the human impact was therefore absolutely minimal. The Minister might be keen to hear that the total cost to the Uruguay Government—vaccines, disinfection and compensation to farmers—totalled some $13.6 million, which is a tiny amount compared with what we had to spend here. So, there is a huge amount to be said for vaccination.

Of course I accept that scientists have begun to understand some of the questions surrounding the effectiveness of vaccination only in the past few months. For that reason, I pay particular tribute to Cross-Bencher Lord Moran, whose determined efforts ensured that the Bill's over-hasty progress through the other place was delayed so that it could be informed by the Royal Society and other reports as well as by those scientific advances. It is curious to think back to the Minister and his colleagues in the other place arguing that the Bill must go through terribly quickly as it was terribly important. Here we are, discussing their response to the Royal Society report on the same day as we consider Lords amendments to the Bill.

Mr. Martlew: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that his party opposed the Royal Society report and wanted a public inquiry, whose results we would not have had for at least three years?

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman is not quite right. We were certainly not opposed to the Royal Society report or the Follett report. We would indeed have welcomed a public inquiry in addition to the Royal Society report, although we understand that the Government did not want that—plainly, it would have been extremely embarrassing for them—and that they used their self-defence mechanism to avoid such an inquiry. However, to suggest that a public inquiry was an alternative to the Royal Society report is quite wrong.

It is curious to think of the Government trying to rush the Bill through the House and the other place, despite the fact that they knew that these two vital reports were due in the summer. The Government wanted the Bill to become law in advance of the reports becoming known.

Mr. Morley *rose—*

Mr. Gray: The Minister wants to correct me.

Mr. Morley: Hindsight is a wonderful thing. When we introduced the Bill, the epidemic had only recently stopped. In all honesty, many people, including us, thought it likely that there would be further outbreaks, and it was important that we had a range of measures to deal with that. Of course, one can never tell when an outbreak might occur. I am glad that there have been no further outbreaks, but we cannot be complacent. I have to say, however, that the hon. Gentleman sounds very complacent.

Mr. Gray: I am astonished to hear the Minister suggest that my remarks are complacent. I would like to think that his Department had contingency plans in place and that, had there been another small outbreak during that period, it could have dealt with that a great deal more effectively than last time, which was an absolute shambles. Let us hope that the Department has learned a few lessons without any new legislation. I am also astonished that he thought it very likely that there would be more outbreaks. I heard no public announcement from the Department that further outbreaks were very likely, but the Minister has now said that.

Paul Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman is keen to intervene.

Paul Flynn: The disease was contained in Uruguay, France, the Netherlands and Ireland, but not here. That was because of the excessive number of animal movements following the first infection. More than 1

[Paul Flynn]

million animals were exposed, as animals travelled to at least six markets. Is it not vital that the Bill is passed as quickly as possible, so that the farming industry is protected not just from another foot and mouth outbreak, but from the possible outbreak of many other diseases such as blue tongue virus, vesicular stomatitis and swine vesicular disease? The limitations on animal movements are crucial.

Mr. Gray: I entirely sympathise with the point about animal movements, and I think that Members on both sides of the House would seek always to restrict animal movements as much as possible, and find ways to use local abattoirs and to sell meat locally, but the truth is that the large buyers of meat buy from across the nation. Of course, a religious cull for certain purposes was the biggest single reason for the movement of elderly ewes that occurred immediately before the main outbreak.

I have heard the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Murphy) several times on the issue. Of course we agree—*[Interruption.]* Halal meat is the answer. Most of the old ewes that were brought down to Devon from the north were used for halal meat in Birmingham. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) is making squeaking noises from a sedentary position, but halal meat was the main reason.

If I may, I shall return to the main point of today's discussion—Lords amendment No. 1, which has the specific purpose of dealing with vaccination. It would not be right for me to allow hon. Members to ramble on about other matters, as it is important to focus on the particular issue. I was making the point that the Government tried to rush the Bill through the House—it was introduced to this place 12 months ago—and that I am glad of the delay, which has allowed us to consider the outcome of the two reports. The science on vaccination is developing all the time.

For example, tests to differentiate between vaccinated animals and those that are infected are now fully available to us. That allowed the OIE—the Office Internationale d'Epizootic—to reduce the time for a return to disease-free status from 12 months to six. It happened very recently, and it allowed the EU temporary committee's draft report in September to advocate emergency vaccination as a tool of first resort.

5.15 pm

I presume that the EU foot and mouth disease directive, due to be published shortly, will also endorse emergency vaccination as the primary means of control, but if there is no similar presumption in favour of vaccination in the United Kingdom we will be at an immediate competitive disadvantage compared with EU countries where vaccination is preferred. Both the EU report and the directive will doubtless recognise the advances and validation of NSP-free vaccines and the differential tests, and mak[illegible]rovision to deal with FMD in line with the new OIE [illegible]. As the Minister has acknowledged, and as was ackn[illegible]edged in the earlier statement, the Department is also mo[illegible]towards being broadly in favour of a degree of [illegible]ccination. I welcome that.

We all accept that there are potential problems with vaccination. An obvious practical difficulty with mass vaccination is the large number of animals involved. The views of the international community, especially on meat exports from a vaccinated country, need further clarification and will doubtless also need further negotiation. At present, vaccination cannot be carried out very easily, which is a great worry. We must ensure that we preserve our disease-free status and the ability to export around the world.

As the Royal Society report notes, the effectiveness and durability of vaccines require much more work. The costs associated with mass vaccination should also be considered, although they are nothing in comparison with the costs of an extensive cull. I accept that there are downsides to vaccination, but at least the amendment offers the Government the opportunity to use it in the event of another outbreak.

The Minister seemed to suggest that the amendment would require the Government to use vaccination. It does not; it merely requires them to make it a priority—to put it at the top of their tree. Of course a contiguous cull would still be allowed. What we are saying is that, whereas in the old days the cull was the presumption, we want vaccination—at the very least, ring-fenced vaccination—to become the presumption.

Problems would be involved in moving to the next stage and making vaccination a more permanent prophylactic, but it should not be beyond the wit of man or the expertise of science to demonstrate to the world that vaccinating to live guarantees a disease-free herd. It is possible to differentiate between animals carrying antibodies as a result of infection and those carrying them as result of vaccination. I personally have been vaccinated against yellow fever, smallpox, measles and, no doubt, a variety of other diseases. That does not make me a global health pariah; on the contrary, it allows me to travel abroad with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and other such useful organisations. Surely the same principle can apply to vaccinated animals.

Moreover, as the Minister mentioned, the meat that we eat today comes from animals that have been vaccinated against all kinds of disease. The notion of vaccination is not necessarily a bad thing. The Food Safety Agency could quite reasonably reach an early conclusion on whether FMD-vaccinated beef is as good as non-vaccinated beef.

We believe that vaccination against FMD, both as a firebreak and potentially, in the longer term, as a more general prophylactic, has real possibilities for the future, although we accept that more work is needed on many aspects. The Lords amendment moves our thinking towards vaccination and away from slaughter in a way that we do not think is achieved by the Government's much weaker amendment to it. We are glad that the Government have moved some way in our direction, but we are disappointed that they cannot accept the Lords amendment. We believe that it truly changes an animal death Bill into what we all want it to be, an animal health Bill.

Mr. Martlew: It is a year since I spoke in the Second Reading debate. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) keeps talking about the outbreak being two years ago, but I remind the House that the week before we introduced the Bill a flock of sheep was killed in south Cumbria on suspicion of being infected, and that

was just over a year ago. We must not forget how devastating the outbreak was—the millions of animals that were killed, the devastation on the farms, the crippling of the tourist industry in many parts of the country and the fact that we spent billions of pounds that could have been spent elsewhere. I am sure that we can all think of how we could have spent the money. To prove how serious it was, we should remember that the general election was postponed because of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. So the politics of having another outbreak have to be taken into consideration.

In Cumbria, I was right in the middle of the argument about vaccination. The farmers were in favour of vaccination, but the National Farmers Union and the food industry were against it. The milk factory where I worked for 20 years was threatened with closure if we vaccinated. I do not accept the idea that if we have another outbreak and introduce a policy of vaccinate to live, we will not have these arguments again. We will still have a problem with the food industry as it will be frightened that consumers will be turned off a particular product if we have a policy of vaccinate to live.

A policy of vaccinate to kill is absolute nonsense. In December, the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee and I attended a conference in Brussels and listened to the Dutch agriculture Minister, who was still shell-shocked by the anger of the people of Holland having found out that 750,000 pigs there had been vaccinated and then all killed. The idea that we should have a policy of vaccinate to kill is nonsensical. An emergency policy of vaccinate to live still raises great worries, as we will have the same arguments with the farmers and the food industry. The way to go is to introduce routine vaccination that becomes part of the culture of farming, rather than being introduced in a crisis. The consumers will accept it. It must be a Europe-wide policy. In animal welfare terms, the benefits will be tremendous, but the spin off to other industries, including the tourist industries, of knowing that we can never go back to the devastation of last year will also be valuable.

When I intervened on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State during her statement, she gave me some assurance that the matter was being looked at, but if European Governments do not show real commitment to routine vaccination, industry will not spend billions of pounds on developing a vaccine, particularly if EU politics are not committed to using it.

We need guidance from the Government. I believe that a vaccine is not far away. When the Select Committee questioned members of the Follett committee, they expressed the same view. I remind the Minister that Britain persuaded the rest of the EU to stop the routine vaccination of animals, so it was done in the past.

I believe that false information has been disseminated about carrying animals. There is no evidence that an animal that has had the disease and recovered passes that disease on to other animals. If we look at the history of foot and mouth disease in this country, some animals who had had the disease must have escaped the cull and survived, but fortunately we have had no more outbreaks this year. I supported the Bill on Second Reading because it gave us the option of vaccination. I was quite impressed by the response from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but I would warn the Minister that the idea that in a crisis we can introduce a policy of vaccination to live will be fraught with the same dangers that we faced last time.

Mr. Curry: I understand the reasons why the Government introduced a Bill so rapidly after the epidemic, but it had a very punitive air, and its measures were draconian. The pause has helped, and it is now much more balanced. On vaccination, the Government have got the balance about right. The other place has gone too far—it has run a little ahead of the science. We must ensure that the Government retain the flexibility to apply measures appropriate to particular circumstances—probably a range of measures—without necessarily being predisposed towards a particular set of measures.

As far as vaccination is concerned, there are three crucial factors. First, we must have a vaccine that is polyvalent—that can deal with all the strains of foot and mouth disease. Secondly, there should be a field test to distinguish vaccinated animals from those that are genuinely infected. In the circumstances of an outbreak, there is no point in sending samples to laboratories and having to wait three days or so for the results. Finally, there is the requirement that international trade rules should deliver the acceptability of vaccinated product and, indeed, that the various people in the industry should accept it.

5.30 pm

Interestingly, in Holland—the Dutch experience did involve vaccination—all vaccinated animal product was destroyed: none of it went into the food chain. The National Farmers Union may have had concerns about vaccination and the possibility of a two-tier market opening up, but as the Minister said, the food industry also had hesitations about the acceptability of vaccinated product. It is all very well saying that all animals have been vaccinated and various steps have been taken—we know that that is so—but as certain other episodes have shown, consumer reaction does not necessarily follow what we would describe as logic. It is entirely for consumers to decide what they wish to buy.

Mr. Drew: As always, the right hon. Gentleman talks eminent good sense. Does he accept that one problem with having a vaccination policy in the midst of an outbreak is that, in effect, there would not be one policy? One might well choose ring-vaccination, but to ensure the most effective policy—and to ensure that animals were being vaccinated to live—it would almost certainly have to be linked to the prophylactic vaccination of virtually all other stock. What are the right hon. Gentleman's views on mixing policies during an outbreak?

Mr. Curry: There would inevitably be a mix. A great deal depends on how rapidly one gets to an outbreak before significant movement occurs. If such movement does occur, a vaccination strategy becomes difficult to apply because of the sheer problems of tracing. I am very doubtful about prophylactic vaccination. There have been instances right across the uplands of trying to count animals for the purpose of making claims on the support systems. It is very difficult indeed to get hold of

[Mr. Curry]

every single sheep, so the answer is, "First, find your sheep." If it were felt that even just a handful of animals had not been caught by prophylactic vaccination, significant difficulties would arise in terms of regulation and marketing.

Why does not the Minister ask Sir Brian Follett to keep a watching brief on this issue? Why is not Sir Brian asked to make an annual report to the Department, and to Parliament, on where the science has taken us? The Department could then add an annexe, stating the policy implications of where we are in terms of vaccines. Very few Members are scientists, and we need someone to translate the science into sensible terms. Sir Brian did an outstanding job in the report; he has credibility, and he would be a good person to take on that task. That, combined with the policy implications and comments from the Food Standards Agency, would be an example of the joined-up government of which we hear a great deal, but see a good deal less.

The Liberal Democrat amendment adds a little in declamatory terms, but absolutely nothing of substance, and I hope that they will not press it to a vote. The sensible thing is for the House to accept the amendment as formulated by the Government—it strikes a sensible balance according to the current state of our knowledge—provided that they set in motion the machinery to ensure regular updating of knowledge, and that they draw the conclusions publicly, for us all to see.

Andrew George: I suppose that I should move amendment (i) in the name of my right hon. Friends and myself.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may speak to the amendment; it will be moved formally later.

Andrew George: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for clarifying the issue, and I apologise for being out of order.

I welcome the efforts made by their lordships in amending the Bill. Some significant and comprehensive work was done in Committee and on Report in the House of Lords, and the Bill, as amended, is considerably better than when the Commons sent it to their lordships. I welcome the opportunity for their lordships to demonstrate that they can be an effective revising Chamber.

I welcome the fact that the Government have accepted some of the amendments originally tabled by my noble Friends on the Liberal Democrat Benches in the House of Lords—for example, that on an annual report in respect of meat imports and the related regulations and surveillance. I also welcome the fact that the Government have shifted their position and are prepared to open their eyes to the opportunity of introducing an amendment that would at least allow a vaccination policy to be used if an outbreak occurs in future.

However, perhaps harping back to today's statement, some lessons should be learned, one of which is that the Government should not attempt to rush through such Bills and that they must provide themselves with a greater opportunity to request reports, such as the two on which we have just considered the Government response, before introducing legislation.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that if ever a Bill would have benefited from pre-legislative scrutiny, this was it?

Andrew George: Absolutely. Although the Select Committee considered aspects of the foot and mouth outbreak and proposals in the Bill, the fact is that a number of important factors were not taken into account. The Bill has benefited from the delay as a result of considering the Anderson and Follett reports, and even the Government could not deny that. Among the lessons that need to be learned generally is the fact the Government need to reflect on the way in which they treat the industry. It is fundamentally important that the Government recognise that they must build a climate of trust between themselves and the industry in any future legislation or action that they take in relation to any future outbreak. What worries me about several of the Government's proposals is that the Bill is based on a lack of trust and forcing the Government's will on farmers.

I welcome the Minister's statement at the commencement of the debate that he is not against the general principle of our amendment, although he did not go on to argue specifically against the practice of our amendment. Is it a question of priority, or does he accept the principle that a vaccinate-to-live policy should be applied wherever possible and that wholesale farm slaughter should be used as a policy of last resort? If he fundamentally agrees with the principle that that policy should be applied, why will he not agree to its inclusion in the Bill? He did not answer that question.

Mr. Morley *rose—*

Andrew George: I will happily give way to the Minister—perhaps he will have an answer.

Mr. Morley: First, amendment No. 1 is unnecessary, as the Government have tabled amendments to respond to the problem. Secondly, it states that vaccination should be the option of first resort, but EU law covering infected premises and dangerous contacts places on us an obligation to slaughter. The amendment is therefore technically flawed. It would enable a person to mount a legal challenge against the Government for implementing normal disease control methods.

Andrew George: I am grateful for that clarification. However, the amendment would not undermine the Government's ability to demonstrate that they had looked at a vaccinate-to-live policy properly. Government amendment (a) in lieu states that the Secretary of State

> "must consider whether in relation to the occurrence treating animals with serum or vaccine is more appropriate".

The Secretary of State might consider that problem, but dismiss very quickly employing treatment with serum or vaccine. That decision cannot be challenged at present. The aim of the amendment is to require the

Government to be more specific. Despite claims to the contrary, it does not commit the Government to a vaccinate-to-live policy. It would require the Government to make every effort to ensure that the option had been considered properly. It would also require them to be able to show that they had considered the matter before another approach was adopted.

Mr. Drew: Who would decide whether the Government had made an appropriate evaluation of a vaccination or serum policy? Would it be the courts, or would an independent agency be established to make that adjudication? I am genuinely confused about how the proposal would work.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. If he accepts the principle behind the amendment, his question suggests that he thinks that the Bill should be further amended to clarify the way in which the decision would be made. There are many opportunities for Parliament in that respect. If the Secretary of State had to demonstrate that proper consideration had been given to a vaccinate-to-live policy, it would be possible for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, for example, to give that decision proper scrutiny. Without that safeguard, the decisions could be made behind closed doors. We know that it is possible that the decision to use a slaughter policy rather than a vaccination policy could be made on the basis of what is convenient for the Department. The reasons for such a decision could be extraneous and not based on principle.

Mr. Martlew: Both of the reports that the House discussed earlier today accuse the Government of having a slow decision-making process, and identified it as a major problem in the most recent foot and mouth outbreak. The amendment would slow that process even further. Why change the Bill in a way that would make sure that that fault is still present when the next outbreak comes along?

Andrew George: I do not believe that the requirement to demonstrate that the Secretary of State has properly considered implementing a vaccinate-to-live policy would slow decision making. The Minister said that he agrees with the proposal in principle, but the hon. Gentleman implies that the Secretary of State should be given a way not to give proper consideration to the policy—he would not have to give full consideration to all the implications of the decision that is eventually made.

I cannot see how it will in practice delay the process, but it may result in better outcomes. Rather than arguing that it may delay a worse outcome, surely it would be better to allow for a proper process that might result in a better outcome with better and quicker control of the disease.

Mr. Curry: Is not the truth that the hon. Gentleman's amendment will not make the blindest bit of difference? There is no way for him to know the nature of the consideration that the Minister has given. In any foreseeable circumstances, it is inconceivable that a Minister would take a decision to slaughter without considering the alternatives, given the sort of public disquiet that that would inevitably raise. I am afraid that although the hon. Gentleman's amendment has a jolly political purpose, it has no practical or political substance at all.

Andrew George: The right hon. Gentleman says that it is inconceivable for Ministers to conclude that it would be better to use a slaughter policy rather than vaccinate if they have properly considered the issue, but during the last outbreak it was conceivable. One of the concerns throughout the outbreak and a reason why a lot of the processes were delayed was that many farmers did not feel that they had been properly represented or that the Government were on their side. It became conceivable that decisions were taken for reasons that were not directed towards the best possible outcome. If we want better and quicker outcomes in any future outbreak, we need transparency in the way in which Government processes work and the decision-making process operates.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) rightly spoke about the impact on the retailing of vaccinated meat. No doubt next time that will be a matter for consideration.

This debate has given us an opportunity to bring forward some excellent proposals, such as the one put forward by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) for an annual report to be made to Parliament and DEFRA on progress to identify a vaccine. I would be interested in the Under-Secretary's response to that proposal because I hope that we could take it forward.

I do not want to detain the House unnecessarily on this matter; I am sure that I have spoken for far too long and I know that many others wish to speak. However, Liberal Democrat Members believe that it is important to be more explicit in the Bill and to be clear that there is a decision-making stream. If the Under-Secretary agrees with the principle of the amendment, it should feature in the Bill.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): May I give some support to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) in supporting the amendment from the other place? I think that we would all like to support it, because it is the ideal for which we strive. Sadly, however, I have to side with my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) in challenging the practicality of the Lords amendment. The Government's amendment is a reasonable compromise between what we would like and what we can work with in practice, so I hope that my hon. Friend does not push this to a Division. If he does, I might be in a different Lobby from him, and that is rather a dangerous occupation for a Conservative Member of Parliament at present.

I am no great expert on the intricacies of vaccination, but the farming community would face difficulties if a system of prophylactic vaccination were introduced. As we have heard, it is virtually impossible—indeed, it is impossible—to ensure that all stock is collected and vaccinated. It is estimated that there are 30 million sheep in the United Kingdom, with 3 million or 4 million in my constituency. Even in normal circumstances it is virtually impossible to get all the sheep down from the fields for dipping.

5.45 pm

During the foot and mouth culling, I attended a number of culls, including one on some large open-range farms where several thousand ewes were slaughtered over a couple of days. Not a single ewe or lamb was left on the hills, but the next day another hundred came out of hiding to see where their colleagues had gone. It is sadly impossible to guarantee that all stock is slaughtered.

Mr. Martlew: I understand the hon. Gentleman's train of thought, but if the vast of majority of the flock is immunised we will not have a major outbreak, will we?

Mr. Atkinson: I am advised that that is not the case. I have been told that if a single animal is not vaccinated, it could travel through the firebreak and spread infection. We were talking about the Dutch experience—there were three quarters of a million pigs in one unit, so there was no problem getting to them and vaccinating them. The situation with sheep and hill cattle is very different. Hill cattle are extremely wild and are hard to round up, as we discovered during the foot and mouth cull. Wild deer are common in many parts of the United Kingdom now, and are potential carriers of foot and mouth—the Minister will threaten me if I am wrong—and there is no point having a prophylactic vaccination system if a large section of the animal population is not vaccinated.

Mr. Martlew: The reality is that we did not kill all the wild deer after the last outbreak, but we have not had any further outbreaks.

Mr. Atkinson: I accept that. I do not know the risks of foot and mouth being transmitted to the wild deer population, but in a fail-safe vaccination system we must consider the chance of wild animals moving within a vaccinated animal community. That possibility has not been properly addressed.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's desire to avoid the unpleasant scenes that he and I witnessed at first hand, but that is a distant eventuality. We may one day achieve it, but in the meantime the Government amendment is the most practical compromise.

Mrs. Browning: Another aspect of the problem was touched on in Committee, but we did not get a definitive answer from the Minister. Any vaccination policy must deal with the question of the right to enter premises to enforce vaccination. That power needs to be looked at carefully.

Mr. Morley: It is in the Bill.

Mrs. Browning: I believe that the Minister is trying to help me, as he is usually helpful. However, a policy of prophylactic vaccination raises the question whether or not the Government will enforce it.

Mr. Atkinson: I agree entirely. How would we ensure that all animals were vaccinated? It would not be practical to test them to see whether a farmer was telling the truth. It would be pretty easy, however, for him to claim that all his animals were vaccinated, but not vaccinate them.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I am afraid that my intervention will not be particularly helpful for my hon. Friend, but it is possible to vaccinate with a bolus that can be traced, so there is accountability.

Mr. Atkinson: I am sure that my hon. Friend is correct, but I mentioned that there were 30 million sheep in the UK, so he will recognise the size of the problem. Obviously, if a farmer was suspected of not vaccinating his flock, that could be checked. My hon. Friend surely cannot be considering random tests in a national flock of that size.

Will the Minister consider vaccination for rare breeds and species? There is certainly a case for prophylactic vaccination of herds of wild cattle, such as the Chillingham cattle in Northumberland, as their meat will never enter the food chain.

I have to say, reluctantly, that their lordships' amendments are too ambitious and that the compromise that we have been asked to support is correct.

Mr. Wiggin: I am in a quandary because I hate to disagree with my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson). I welcome the Lords amendment to a part of the Bill that initially gave the Minister the right to slaughter anything he felt like slaughtering. Indeed, the Minister defended that admirably in Committee, despite our protestations. However, the current emphasis on "vaccinate to live" is the right line to take. Vaccination is right. Unfortunately, the Government's amendment does not seem to put a strong emphasis on vaccination to live. Instead, they revert to previous arguments about what they would do to prevent the spread of disease. I have no objection to the Government wanting to prevent the spread of disease; that is entirely laudable and their right. However, they have missed the point of the Lords amendment: the vaccination policy puts the emphasis on the right to live.

The provision would make a difference because the vaccinate-to-live policy would apply to animals that were not infected or that had not been in contact with infected animals. The Lords amendment is sensible and helpful. The Government's proposals fail to incorporate the laudable parts of the Lords amendment, which is a great shame. Last year, there was an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the state of Rio Grande du Sol in Brazil and all bovine animals in the region were vaccinated. Thirty days after completion of the programme, the European Commission lifted its previous ban on meat imports from the area.

Vaccination is getting better and better. It is laudable and offers the right way forward. The Government's proposals miss the point of a helpful amendment from the other place. I hope that the Minister will stop living in the nightmare of the past and that he will grasp the potential for more and better vaccination to live.

Mr. Drew: One point that has not yet been made is that one reason for keeping animals alive is to sell them.

I am worried about whether there would be a market for vaccinated animals. As the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) pointed out, if we do not carry out prophylactic vaccination, there will be unvaccinated animals. Might not that problem undermine the proposal?

Mr. Wiggin: That is not a problem. We face problems with vaccination in our own lives every day. I have a one-year-old daughter and I am going through the MMR vaccine dilemma. We all have to live with such things. We are constantly told that the technology is improving. I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but there is no problem because foot and mouth disease would not pass into the food chain through vaccinated animals.

I hope that the Minister will bear my comments in mind and that, if the technology exists, he will implement the positive sentiment that he expressed in his speech and that the Government will not retreat behind a policy of slaughtering to prevent the spread of disease when they could be vaccinating against a threat from abroad, even if there was no threat in this country.

A vaccinate-to-live policy offers huge opportunities, and the Government are failing to grasp that helpful olive branch.

Mr. Morley: I welcome the hon. Members for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) and for St. Ives (Andrew George) to their new roles and responsibilities for their respective parties. There have been some useful and thoughtful contributions to the debate. Several Members spoke with some authority. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) was a strong and consistent advocate of vaccination throughout the recent outbreak. Like many Members who spoke, he had firsthand experience of it. He pointed out that the Government's changing response was significant in dealing with some of the problems that arose during the outbreak, especially in Cumbria.

One claim that has come up time and again is that the Bill is all about culling. It is not. My hon. Friend is right to point that out. During the last outbreak, a minority of people objected strongly to the contiguous cull and there were many appeals to the district veterinary manager, many hundreds of which were upheld, according to circumstances.

If we moved to emergency vaccination, however, there would also be a minority of people who would not wave flags when they saw the vaccination teams coming down the road. A minority would vociferously resist vaccination for all sorts of reasons. My hon. Friend is right about that.

Mr. Drew: As I pointed out earlier, I am worried about how far it will be possible or practical to build a consensus. The farming industry is so differentiated that some people will vaccinate come what may, while others will do everything possible to avoid vaccination. What strategy does my hon. Friend anticipate to cope with those different forces?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) referred to the disagreement about the vaccination strategy. That must be resolved both by addressing some of the technical issues that were raised by hon. Members and by engaging the food and livestock industries in the debate. Many of the problems can be resolved, but we must do so at present while we are developing animal health strategies and reviewing our contingency plans. We should deal with the issues in a cool and calculated way rather than in the middle of an epidemic.

Mr. Martlew: Are those negotiations taking place? Are the Government talking to the NFU and the food industry? Have there been any discussions about compensation if the value of meat and milk from vaccinated animals is less than it would be from those that had not been vaccinated?

Mr. Morley: We are talking to industry groups about all the issues: We set up a stakeholder group that was active throughout the epidemic and successfully gave all interested parties in the livestock industry the opportunity to discuss the issues with Ministers, the chief vet and Government scientists. My hon. Friend's last point is difficult for the Government to address, not least because it has been agreed to use vaccination in a range of cases. There is no reason that the vaccinated product should not go into the food chain. That was certainly agreed by the Food Standards Agency during the outbreak.

6 pm

Paul Flynn: Is not the objection to eating meat that has been subject to vaccination an irrational and unscientific one? The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) said that he had had a bumper bundle of vaccines. The difference is that no one is planning to eat him; even in the Conservative party, cannibalism has been ruled out. However, there is a feeling that many shoppers might object. During the foot and mouth epidemic, the result of the virtual collapse of the flow of meat from British farms was that more meat, much of which had already been vaccinated, was sucked in from overseas? Will the Department campaign to ensure that the fear of vaccinated meat is removed?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right. It is ironic that when vaccination was being considered during the epidemic, some of the product that came into this country to make up the shortfall was vaccinated. Consumers are not concerned about vaccination as long as it has been demonstrated to be safe, and as long as bodies such as the Food Standards Agency have looked into it in some detail.

Mr. Drew: Is my hon. Friend talking to the milk industry about the impact of vaccinating cattle for other diseases, as we may be faced with the same question in relation to bovine TB? Will he say something about that matter, as it will become an issue in addition to whether people eat the meat?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right. We are trying to develop a vaccine against TB and I hope that we make the breakthrough. We are committing resources to that and it is one of the criteria within the terms of reference of the independent scientific group. He is right that if we

[Mr. Morley]

use vaccination, we must reassure people that its use is safe. That will be part of the vaccine development and I have no doubt that the issue will be addressed.

Mr. Wiggin: At the moment, TB vaccine is about 60 per cent. effective. What target is he looking for before the vaccine is introduced? I believe that £60 million has gone into TB research, of which £1.6 million has gone into bovine TB. What will the target be?

Mr. Morley: The vaccine certainly will need to be a lot more effective but a considerable amount of work is yet to be done. Scientists are confident that it is possible to develop a vaccine for bovine TB. The difficulty is the time scale. However, a vaccine is our avowed objective and we are proceeding with it.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) said that balance was important in terms of vaccination. That is where amendment No. 1 from the other place and the Liberal Democrat amendment are flawed, as they restrict the Government and are open to arguments of interpretation. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) wondered who would interpret and decide on these matters, but his answer was a little vague. That is exactly where one can start to get into difficulties.

I understood the point raised by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon about Sir Brian Follett. We have set up a scientific advisory group chaired by the Department's new chief scientist. That gives us an opportunity to bring in a range of opinions on taking things forward. There should be periodic reports on progress, as we want to be as open and transparent as possible.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon and the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) are right that there are still issues to be resolved. The issue of vaccination is not simple and a range of criteria must be taken into account. They referred to hill sheep and the problem of getting them down and vaccinating them. There is also the risk of stress for the animals, which can have all sorts of problems.

Mr. Martlew: I understand my hon. Friend's comment about fell sheep, but is it not Government policy to tag them? Will we not have to keep a record of them? The animals will suffer stress then; I do not understand the difference.

Mr. Morley: I was talking about the practicality of vaccinating those sheep. All these issues can be addressed, but the Government are trying to strike a balance by recognising that there is an increased role for vaccination. We concede that there have been changes in technology that make the situation easier. Also, we recognise that there may be circumstances in which we want to use stamping-out policies as a first-strike response. By law, we have to do that with respect to infected premises and dangerous contacts.

The Liberal Democrat amendment calls for a vaccinate-to-live policy to be taken into account as a first issue. There may be circumstances where, as part of a disease control strategy, we may want to use a vaccinate-and-kill policy. For example, there might be an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in an intensive pig unit. In such an outbreak, a considerable plume of virus will be downwind from the unit. There may be another unit, smack bang in that virus plume. That is more than a dangerous contact; it is almost certain that those pigs will develop the virus. That unit may have 10,000 or 20,000 pigs. In relation to disposal and humane culling, we want to control that outbreak. The best of way of doing that is to vaccinate the whole herd and then to cull in a controlled way. The amendment would take away that option.

Andrew George: The Under-Secretary has perhaps not read the amendment correctly. It does not discount that option. The fact that the amendment does not specifically list all of the options that might be considered does not mean that a vaccinate-to-kill policy cannot be pursued by the Secretary of State. On the question of to whom the evidence for the decision-making can be shown, I would regret any Department not wanting transparency in the decision-making process. Whether the evidence is shown or not, it is still open to legal challenge and the Secretary of State could still be challenged by a lawyer on behalf of a farmer.

Mr. Morley: We are open to legal challenge on a range of subjects at any time; that has cost a lot of people a lot of money in recent months and years. I do not dispute the reasonableness with which the hon. Gentleman has made his case, or that he genuinely recognises that there are circumstances in which we might want to take a different approach. However, once we start writing into legislation measures that we regard as flawed, we may find that there are many people who are not as reasonable or as helpful as who want him to challenge us.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon and the hon. Member for Hexham recognised the balance that the Government are trying to strike by recognising that emergency vaccination has a role, but also that there may be a range of options and circumstances in which we take a different approach.

I want to reassure the hon. Member for Hexham on rare breeds, of which Chillingham cattle is one. During the last outbreak, we sought and obtained permission to use vaccination for rare breeds and some rare zoo animals if the circumstances dictated that that should be the case. In relation to our detailed response to the Follett and the Anderson reports, we have made it clear that vaccination remains an option for breeds. If they are under threat, we can consider vaccination. However, use of vaccination in relation to disease control is a different issue.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) made a very strong case for vaccination, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew). I strongly disagree with him, however, in relation to his comments about Lords amendment No. 1, with which we cannot agree. As I have emphasised, it is not that we do not agree with the principle. The Government are showing that we recognise the change in circumstances and technology and are responding to the recommendations in the two reports on the basis of the amendment that we have tabled. That has been recognised by the hon.

Member for Hexham, who has first-hand experience of the epidemic in his area, and by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon, who is a former Minister and current Chairman of the Select Committee. I hope that the hon. Member for Leominster gives careful thought to their wise counsel.

In relation to the amendment, we are trying to respond to the debate in Committee. I accept the comments of the hon. Member for St. Ives that we have moved a long way in relation to the original Bill. That reflects the reasonable points made by Members on both sides of the House, and the commitments that we gave in Committee and on Report that we would address them.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): As my hon. Friend appreciates, I have been listening quietly to this debate. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) made the point about involving Sir Brian Follett in the future with follow-up reports. My hon. Friend said that the answer is the science committee that he has set up, and that he is all in favour of transparency. Clearly, however, this matter will develop over time, and there is an issue of public confidence for the future. Will he comment a little on what information we will receive in the guise of transparency, and what information the public will receive?

Mr. Morley: First, on the contingency plans, we are making them public and involving a range of stakeholders in the debate and the formulation of those plans. Secondly, in relation to the scientific group, which, as I mentioned, has been set up, we will want to keep in touch with Sir Brian and with Dr. Anderson on the way in which these issues develop. We are also committed to bringing forward and developing the animal health strategy, on which we are consulting with a range of groups. We want all of the documents to be living documents, as we will come back periodically to review and revise them, and to make sure that they address the relevant points for which they are designed. Some exercises and tests will be necessary in relation to the contingency arrangements, too.

We therefore want to involve a range of experts, some of whom are outside the Department, in terms of their advice and involvement in the development of strategies and future plans. A huge amount of work is going on, and we propose to make public the progress on these issues and the time scales for reporting. That is also part of our commitment to transparency and openness.

Mr. Kidney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. May I move the discussion on one stage further? One of his objections to the Lords amendment was that it could contravene European law. As we make discoveries, developments, explain matters, and develop policy, what would be the position in Europe? Would we be able to carry Europe with us in making similar changes?

Mr. Morley: I believe so. There has been a change in attitude from the EU and the Office Internationale d'Epizootic. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon and my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle joined me at the conference in Brussels that was co-sponsored by the UK and Holland to look at the whole issue of foot and mouth disease. The experience that we had in the last outbreak has changed the thinking in all countries; it has also changed the thinking in relation to the international organisation and the European Union. Incidentally, that change makes the vaccination options easier: it addresses some of the issues and problems that we came across in the course of the last epidemic.

I hope that I have demonstrated that the Government have responded to the thrust of the arguments in terms of the role of vaccination, that the Lords amendment is flawed, and that we cannot accept it. I call on the House to support the Government.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 190.

Division No. 355] **[6:15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George

Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Charlotte Atkins and Mr. Phil Willis

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*

Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 1 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 12 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 13, after clause 4, to insert the following new clause—*20-day livestock movement restriction rule*—

"In the 1981 Act the following subsection is inserted after section 8(1) (movement generally)—

"(1A)In making an order under subsection (1) restricting the movement of animals in connection with an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, any restriction of 20 days or more shall lapse at the end of a period of 8 weeks following the last confirmed case.""

Mr. Morley: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 45 and Government amendments (a) and (b) thereto.

Mr. Morley: The Bill is important. It deals with crucial animal health issues. In light of that, I am sorry that the Lords made the amendment. No one disputes the fact that there are serious problems of movement control and stock movement. However, I emphasise that the 20-day standstill rules are supported by firm scientific and veterinary advice and represent the Government's current best view of an appropriate precautionary peacetime control. The main purpose of the Lords amendment is to protect against future outbreaks, rather than deal with the aftermath of past ones. That is one of a number of reasons why we strongly disagree with the amendment, which seems to imply that movement controls should be applied only in the course of an epidemic. That is not the way that the Government see it and it is not the way that the independent reports see it. Furthermore, it is not the way that the majority of those in the livestock industry see it—they recognise that there is a sound argument for movement controls.

There is a legitimate debate about the extent of the controls and how they should be applied. In my experience, however, the vast majority of people in the livestock industry accept that there is a case for such controls as a routine measure to reduce the risk of disease.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I agree that the Lords amendment is flawed in that respect, but there is a principle behind it. The Minister mentioned the need for movement controls and, in principle, I agree. Does he accept, however, that the present 20-day rule is a restriction, not just a control? It is an overhang from the previous foot and mouth outbreak. Will he take this opportunity to give advance notice to the farming industry of how he sees that control system working? We cannot have a restriction that is so deadly, in particular to stock rearing and to the sheep industry?

Mr. Morley: I sat down with industry representatives during the summer to talk about the implications of the

[Mr. Morley]

20-day rule. The hon. Gentleman is right to the extent that that rule was strictly applied during the epidemic as a disease-control measure. However, the way in which it is being applied at present reflects changes that I agreed with the industry—a range of relaxations have been put in place and we have tried to strike a balance between my recognition of the industry's concerns and the detrimental impact that the rule can have on them, which I and the Department try to take into account, and the need to reduce the risk of disease spreading.

A large percentage of the livestock industry can work within the rules that we have amended. Some sections of the industry may find it difficult to do so. We take those issues seriously. We want to examine them and we will do so in the light of the independent risk assessments, which will be published towards the end of the month. That will allow us to consider movement controls in time for the spring movement regime and to put whatever recommendations are made in place.

Mr. Curry: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the problems with the controls and the way in which farmers see them is that, in practice, they seem leaky and contradictory? For example, I can buy sheep and put them in a field next to my neighbour's sheep, separated by a bit of wire fence, and I am stuck with them for 20 days, but he can sell his sheep on. Farmer Morley and Farmer Curry can take sheep to market and they can be in adjacent pens talking to each other. I can take Farmer Morley's sheep home but, because I have put them in quarantine, they are not caught by the 20-day rule. I cannot take my own sheep home without being caught by the rule. Those are the contradictions that bring the measure into disrepute. Those are the problems that the Minister has to solve if he is to get farmers to consent willingly to accept a measure that we all agree is necessary.

Mr. Morley: As always, the right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, although there is supposed to be a separation distance between the fields as part of the isolation conditions. I accept that there are anomalies that need to be addressed. It is a case of balancing the risk and of taking measures to reduce risk. Whatever the regime that is put in place, there are likely to be a few anomalies. We have to try to square those anomalies while achieving an adequate balance. The independent risk assessment from the Veterinary Laboratories Agency will help us to deal with that issue.

Paul Flynn: The report makes it clear that if a 20-day movement rule had been in place when foot and mouth came to this country, the disease would have been confined to a tiny area. There were only a few cases of airborne infection; the rest resulted from animal movements. There are about half a dozen deadly diseases that could come into the country at any moment. It would be too late to impose a movement ban once they had done so; we must have the ban in place now.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right. If we had had the 20-day rule in place when the incident took place in Heddon-on-the-Wall—the outbreak in the pigs there and the fact that it was not reported—the disease still would have spread, because of the two-week delay, but the consequences would not have been anywhere near as bad as they were as a result of the huge movement of sheep that took place. It is a question of trying to reduce the chances of that happening.

There has to be some sort of movement control. The principle is not hugely controversial. A minority will always want to return to the situation before FMD. I have made clear that that is not an option. We are not going back to the situation before FMD. Many of the measures in the Bill—vaccination, compensation and a range of other issues—are a recognition that, after FMD, the situation has changed for ever and that we must try to minimise the impact of dreadful epidemics. I am not talking only about foot and mouth: we must be on our guard against other exotic diseases. The control of animal movements is one of the tools in our armoury. We must accept that.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The Minister is elaborating on the thoughts behind the present movement restrictions. Does he accept, nevertheless, that the millions of animal movements that took place prior to the outbreak were perfectly legal and reflected the market livestock at the time. There may be flaws in that market. Many of us want a market that is much closer to home—that will minimise the transport of meat, whether live or on the hoof. Nevertheless, that market was legal. If it is his view and that of the Curry report that we have to open up markets for farmers—if farmers are going to have to be more commercial, to sell their produce more directly—that must be squared with the right of farmers to move their livestock and get the best value out of it.

Mr. Morley: I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman—the vast majority of those movements were legal and no criticism should be made of the people who were moving livestock because it was their legal right and they were not breaking any laws. On the periphery, there were concerns about traceability and out-of-ring sales—wider issues that need to be tackled. I am glad to say that we were successful in obtaining funding, in our bid in the 2002 spending review, to develop more sophisticated traceability and sheep-tagging systems. We want to move to electronic tagging and to develop that in conjunction with the industry. There is much support in the industry for that as well as for improving traceability. Those are all issues to which we must apply ourselves. That does not get us away from the fact, however, that the lessons learned inquiry recommended that the 20-day standstill should be retained while a wide-ranging cost-benefit analysis and a risk assessment was carried out, and that is what we are doing.

I find it puzzling that although the other place suspended progress on this Bill to allow consideration of the independent reports, it ignored one of the key recommendations in the reports—the stop on movement. I emphasise that we are applying the 20-day standstill with variations and exceptions to recognise the needs of the industry, as an interim measure until we have the risk assessment and the cost-benefit analysis. When we have those, we will reconsider the issue and decide what is most appropriate in terms of risk of disease, taking into account the impact on the industry. We must presuppose, however, that there will still be a standstill period.

Mr. Curry: Will the Minister spell out the timetables for the assessment and the possible responses? As he said, people understand that it is important to make sure there is no recurrence of the disease, and that it is important to deal with the conditions that may have contributed to the spread of the disease. However, the hon. Gentleman will equally appreciate that the movement of livestock is an integral part, especially of upland farming and breeding. If people feel that there is a programme of evaluation followed by policy responses, I am sure that they will accept circumstances more willingly than if they think they are just knocking their head against a back wall, while the sheep are sucking the pebbles dry.

Mr. Morley: I understand that point. I can give an assurance that we expect the risk assessment and the evaluations towards the end of this month. We will then hold public consultation on that, and consultation on any potential changes or recommendations that flow from that. I can also give an assurance that, whatever regime is put in place; the intention is to have it agreed in time for the spring movements in early spring next year. That is a clear timetable, which takes account of the needs of the livestock industry.

As I said, I am surprised that Members in the other place have pre-empted the studies that are still going on and have gone against veterinary advice about the minimum proportionate movement restrictions. They have passed primary legislation which requires that a 20-day standstill would have to lapse eight weeks after the last confirmed case of an outbreak. Even if I thought that the measure was serious and proportionate—I appreciate that it gives an opportunity for a debate on the 20-day rule, and I understand why people may want to discuss that—the eight-week period does not make much sense to me. Eight weeks is not very long after the last known outbreak of a major epidemic. There could well be further risks, which could last beyond eight weeks. It is an arbitrary cut-off point, which we cannot accept.

I accept on behalf of the Government that there need to be strict controls on movements during the outbreak, and that those will be different afterwards. I accept the reasoning behind that, and it is what we have done through the range of exceptions from the 20-day rule that have been progressively introduced during the year, which have relaxed the controls. Some veterinary advisers feel strongly that we have gone too far. Again, it is a question of balance, recognising and responding to the legitimate concerns and needs of the livestock industry, while following the best veterinary advice and minimising risk. We are reviewing the rules.

I agree with the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) that the amendment is not serious and does not belong to the Bill. It is certainly a vehicle for discussing the 20-day rule and we have no objection to debating the issues, because they are serious. However, the amendment is flawed and I ask the House to reject it.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I start by acknowledging that the Minister has made it clear that sensible people believe that in the case of a crisis such as the one that we endured during the foot and mouth epidemic, movement must be restricted. He is right to say that, with the exception of a very few people, the entire House and the whole industry would acknowledge that. The issue is for how long movement should be restricted.

The 20-day rule was imposed to deal with what the Secretary of State described during her statement as the horror and tragedy of foot and mouth and with the problems that movement would have caused by exacerbating that crisis. The logic was that by preventing livestock from leaving a holding for 20 days after new animals had arrived on it, the disease would be confined to an individual farm, so the rule became part of the interim foot and mouth arrangements.

Some 10 months after the last confirmed case, the industry recognises that the need for the rule must be debated again. We should not underestimate the effect that it is having on the livestock industry. Hon. Members in all parts of the House will have heard from farmers in their constituencies who are suffering because of the continuing imposition of the 20-day rule. The Minister said—revealingly, I thought—that had the 20-day rule been in place before the outbreak, its spread would not have been so great. That is a self-evident truth, but from that we surely cannot make the judgment that we should have as an on-going precaution for all time a 20-day rule, just in case there is an outbreak of foot and mouth or any of the other diseases to which it might apply.

A restriction on movement cannot be a permanent precaution; it can only be a reaction to a problem that may arise when we hear about a confirmed case or outbreak of a significant disease. I would be very worried if the Minister were considering the imposition of such a rule as a permanent precaution against possible outbreaks. Perhaps he will intervene to reassure me.

6.45 pm

Mr. Morley: I make it very clear that we are indeed considering permanent movement restrictions. Such restrictions are designed to deal not just with an epidemic, but with future animal disease risk. I do not think that the majority of the agriculture industry is against the idea of movement restrictions. People want to discuss measures that they consider to be proportionate and effective, and which take account of the other points that have been raised. I must make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that the Bill is about reducing risk for the future and protecting our livestock industry, following advice from our chief veterinary officer, our chief scientist and two independent inquiries. Is the hon. Gentleman saying, on behalf of the Conservative party, that he would ignore the advice from those bodies?

Mr. Hayes: What I am saying on behalf of the Conservative party is that if the 20-day rule in its current form was allowed to continue in perpetuity—

Mr. Morley: I am not saying that.

Mr. Hayes: I am glad that the Minister is not saying that. If the rule were allowed to continue in that form, the British livestock industry would be decimated.

[Mr. Hayes]

That is the simple fact of the matter. If the Minister does not believe me, perhaps he will listen to the National Farmers Union.

Paul Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: I shall quote from the NFU. I am sure that that will inform and inspire the hon. Gentleman's intervention and make it even more incisive and cogent than his interventions usually are.

The NFU states—I am sure that this reflects the views of farmers with whom I have dealt around the country, and I am sure that it reflects the opinions expressed in the Minister's communications with farmers:

"The 20-day rule, which in nearly all cases restricts the movements of any of the animals on a farm once some animals have been brought on to the farm, is causing considerable practical difficulties for many farmers. Particular problems in the production of sheep are being experienced, given their natural breeding cycle. The unnecessary complexities of the restrictions and the adverse effects they are having on the running of farm businesses are profound."

As I said at the outset, I do not pretend that we do not have to consider movement restrictions. We need a sensible balance. The Secretary of State said earlier that there must be a proportionate level of control and a balance between costs on industry and necessary precautions. Most of us would accept that.

Paul Flynn: The NFU is, not unexpectedly, as conservative as ever and refuses to accept change where change is essential. If the 20-day rule becomes permanent, why does not the hon. Gentleman encourage non-contact ways of marketing animals, which worked successfully during the foot and mouth epidemic? I refer to marketing through direct sales, video links and the internet, which not only reduces the risk of infection but reduces the suffering of animals by reducing the number of journeys.

Mr. Hayes: That is a good point, but it would require massive change in the livestock industry. The hon. Gentleman is right that some change is taking place. There are new and more innovative ways of trading, but the idea that that could be switched on like a tap, and that suddenly the livestock industry can change the habits not just of a lifetime but of generations, many of which are embedded in local culture and local business practice, is fanciful. He is right to suggest that we should aim at such additional means of selling products. However, it will not happen tomorrow, and unless we do something quickly to ease the burden that the 20-day rule is placing on the industry, there will be much less of an industry to regulate. He would not want that to happen any more than I would; I know that he is a generous and intelligent man who shares many of my perspectives on these issues. He is right that we need to consider more innovative ways of dealing with these matters, but they cannot be used immediately, although we are faced now with a significant problem in the livestock industry, as is reflected in the comments of the NFU.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Perhaps he can defend the NFU from the brickbats that have been travelling in its direction from Newport. I remind him of what the NFU said about the movement scheme:

"We have urged the development and introduction of a new permanent control regime to be introduced as early as possible."

That is the NFU's view.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I said, there is widespread consensus about the need to be moderate and practical in these matters, but that consensus must strike the very balance that the Secretary of State identified in her statement between sensible precaution and the costs and burdens imposed on the industry. My suggestion to the House, which is reflected in the Lords amendments, is that that burden is currently falling too heavily on the industry.

We have heard once again from the Minister that a detailed cost-benefit and risk-assessment analysis will be considered. We are aware of that, although it is not likely to be implemented until February. I understand from him and the Secretary of State that we are likely to know more about that later this month. That is good and healthy, but it will not please the industry or impress those who are currently struggling to maintain businesses, many of which are on the very edge commercially. We should not view this matter outside the context of the overall problems that farmers face. I do not need to remind the Minister or the House of how profound those difficulties are, especially in the less-favoured areas and among sheep farmers and some of the people represented by the hon. Members who are present in the Chamber. Those people will not receive well a conclusion to the deliberations that does not recognise that the existing regime is too punitive, costly, regulatory and burdensome for them.

I should like to refer to a matter that has not been aired in detail so far this evening, although it may be as we continue. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) said, in many cases the rigidity of the 20-day rule is encouraging abuse. Farmers face an unpalatable choice between breaking the 20-day rule and going out of business. That is not an acceptable choice for us as responsible Members of this House to impose on the industry.

Mr. Drew: I concur with the hon. Gentleman. In answer to a written question, I was told that trading standards authorities have identified almost 2,000 cases of abuse. Of course, those involved in trading standards are themselves under pressure, so I suspect that there are more such cases. The crux of the matter is the need to separate the work of farmers from that of dealers. I have asked for that to happen throughout; if only it could be done. I know that some farmers are dealers, but not all dealers are farmers. Let us deal with the real problem. That is where the industry is at fault: it has failed to realise that the fault lay with those dealers who drove animals around the system spreading the disease and would do the same again, unless we do something about it. What does he have to say about that problem?

Mr. Hayes: I am reminded of the comments made by Countess Mar in the other place, where she made a similar suggestion to that of the hon. Gentleman. I think that she used the phrase "wheeler dealers" in referring to people with small pockets of land all over the place.

whose regard for biosecurity is at best limited. He is right that we must recognise that, as well as the vast majority of dealers and farmers who are responsible, straightforward and honourable business men, there are always people who will try to get around the law and breach it to their advantage. We need to be mindful of that, as any responsible Government would be.

When I speak of breaking the 20-day rule, however, I am speaking not especially about that minority, but about the perfectly reasonable and sensible farmers who are now obliged against their instincts and judgment to face up to either going out of business or breaking that rule. That is a matter of profound concern. Countess Mar—I remind the House that she is a Cross Bencher and not a Conservative peer—also said:

"There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that the 20-day standstill rule is being flouted, simply because it is unreasonable, unworkable and unenforceable."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 1223.]

I say to the Minister that, when that proper, independent study on cost benefit and risk assessment has been published, the resulting Government action must be based on those three factors; it must be reasonable, workable and enforceable. It must be bought by the industry.

It is perhaps worth saying at this juncture that this whole debate has to be founded on the basis of a partnership between the industry and the Government. If we do not have such partnership when something as catastrophic as foot and mouth disease occurs, our job in controlling, containing and dealing with it will be all the more difficult. The Americans formed a national strategy—we will debate this matter later, so I will not test your patience too much, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to deal with such problems that is very much rooted in the sort of partnership-based and collaborative approach to which I referred. In a sense, the 20-day rule is relevant to those matters, as it is emblematic of the tensions that they involve.

The Minister always speaks with authority, knowledge and conviction about these matters, but I disagree with him that we are examining an aspect of the Lords' consideration that is somehow exceptional. The 20-day rule is intrinsically linked to biosecurity, which we will debate in due course. However, I think that the separation of the 20-day rule and movement from biosecurity is rather artificial. I shall put it no more strongly than that. The issue needs to be seen as part of an integrated strategy to deal with the problems. If we had had a more cohesive and integrated strategy, it may well be that we could have handled foot and mouth more effectively. While Anderson certainly makes the point to which the Minister drew attention in respect of the 20-day rule, he also rightly expresses significant concern about the cohesiveness, coherence and integration of the strategy. Ministers should now acknowledge those concerns and I hope that they will bear them in mind in developing their national strategy.

For me, that issue is at the very heart of the tension that I believe underlies the matters before us. The Lords have got it right in wanting to be more flexible in respect of the 20-day rule. In that respect, I draw the attention of the House to the situation in Scotland. Hon. Members will know that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon pointed out about a week ago when we debated agricultural matters, the 20-day rule is applied much more flexibly in Scotland.

Mr. Morley: It is the same.

Mr. Hayes: The process by which one can obtain an exception in Scotland is more flexible. Incidentally, the Minister will be aware of the worry that, when we draw up a national contingency plan, there may be some need to make the Scottish experience rather less flexible in order to deliver a degree of consistency. Clearly, cross-border trade has to be taken into account in that regard. The border does not necessarily prevent animals from being moved across from England to Scotland, so there are issues of consistency involved in the traffic of livestock.

7 pm

The important thing is that the Scottish experience shows that exceptions can be implemented without significant risk. There is not much evidence that those risks have caused problems. The question must therefore be asked: if that can be done in Scotland, why can it not be done in England? Lord Plumb made that point when these matters were debated in the other place.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): My family farms in the borders of Scotland, and all our cattle go over the border to Berwick-upon-Tweed. We now find that much more difficult to arrange because of the difference between the two countries. We are only four miles over an open border. In fact, our land runs up to the border, so if the cattle get through the fence, they go into England. The whole position is, therefore, ambiguous, because if we want to get them back, we have to go through another system. Does that help my hon. Friend?

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend speaks with the perspicacity and incisiveness for which he has become well known in the time that he has been here. He makes precisely the point that I was making about the need for a consistent policy across the two countries, given that normal business practice means that livestock will be transported between the two.

It is worth saying a bit about the Scottish experience, because it is relevant to the amendments. Subject to the agreement of the Scottish Environment and Rural Affairs Department, farmers can get a separation authorisation for any animal. Their premises are not checked when the licence is issued, but there are spot checks, which represent a significant deterrent to those who might not be following the rules as carefully as they should be. The separation authorisation means that when brought-on animals are held separately from other animals on the farm, the 20-day standstill will apply only to those animals and not to any others. Additionally, when a farmer identifies animals to be moved off his farm and holds them separately from animals that have been brought on and mixed with other animals, those animals to be moved off will not be subject to the 20-day standstill.

Those are important differences between Scotland and England, because they afford the flexibility that allows trading and dealing. Although I acknowledge the

[Mr. Hayes]

point made by the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) that not all dealers are farmers, many farmers are dealers. I was in conversation with one such person in Nottinghamshire last week, who did precisely what my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) does, in moving animals between Scotland and England. He emphasised the difficulties that the inconsistency and the inflexibility of the 20-day rule caused for his business.

It is important for us to learn from that experience. The Minister will know that, in England, it is possible to get such an exception only for individually identified breeding rams and bulls bought at market, or sale bulls and rams returning unsold from a market or sale, which are isolated. There is room for manoeuvre here by the Government. The House of Lords has identified that fact, in looking studiously and carefully at the matter. Some flexibility in the application of the quite proper restrictions on movement that the Minister has identified—the need for which responsible Members will acknowledge in the light of the crisis—needs to be taken into consideration. For that reason, I am sympathetic with the Lords, and—I know that this will come as a great blow to him—less sympathetic with the Minister.

Mr. Drew: I do not want to speak for long on this matter, but this is the crux of how we proceed with the Bill. As someone who suffered, along with others, on the Bill when it was going through the Commons, I wonder whether I am experiencing déjà-vu, given that we started a year ago. Never let it be said that legislation is rapid in this place. Sometimes it is helpful to have the benefit of hindsight, and we now have the benefit of the hindsight of the Follett and Anderson reports. It needs to be put on record that those reports were, to a large extent, supportive of much of what the Government were trying to do.

I think that there is room for compromise here, although my hon. Friend the Minister has said that, until we get the results of the cost-benefit analysis, the 20-day rule will remain in place. Inevitably, that will need to be reconsidered regularly. We can look at the causes of the foot and mouth outbreak and at who was to blame, but what made it such a major outbreak was that the animal movements had an effect similar to pouring petrol on a fire. They completely took away any ability to control the disease.

My worry is that, unless we acknowledge two fundamental features of what went wrong and do something about them, that could happen again. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) said, it might not be foot and mouth next time; it could be blue tongue. Questions have also been asked about bovine tuberculosis. We face an epidemic of that in my part of the world, and I want to make a connection between those diseases, because the issues are not completely separate.

There are two matters to which I want to draw the attention of the House. First, there were people who were either acting illegally or, at best, recklessly—as they had been doing day in, day out—because of the way in which the process encouraged them to perform their duties. I referred to dealers earlier. I used that as a fairly pejorative term, but I would not insult everyone by using it. What went wrong in relation to animal movements was that the dealers were driving the process rather than responding to it. I am not talking about a person who deals with 20 or 30 animals; I am talking about people who deal with thousands of animals.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The hon. Gentleman spoke of the dealers driving the process. I know what he is trying to say, but it is surely the supermarkets that are driving it. On the whole, the dealers are responding to a supermarket-set agenda when it comes to beef and sheep meat.

Mr. Drew: I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman, in that we have to acknowledge that the operation of the food chain is too centralised. I have long argued that we need to re-localise it, but people say that that option has now gone away from us and that we have to be realistic and realise that the chain is now fundamentally different.

Paul Flynn: Does my hon. Friend think it false of the Opposition to blame the Government and the supermarkets for all the problems of the farming industry? Is it not true, as my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) said, that one group of animals bought by a farmer just before the foot and mouth epidemic was discovered, to his horror, to have been on 11 different holdings in the previous three months? That was all about fraud, and about maximising the number of payments made for those animals. That practice for sheep—bed and breakfasting, as it is called—was rife in the industry, and the 20-day rule is the answer to the problem.

Mr. Drew: I cannot speak with the same knowledge as my hon. Friend, although I have made allegations about my own area. Farmers there have been very clear with me about where some of the blame—we are talking about a minority of people—needs to be laid in relation to the dreadful legacy of foot and mouth.

My second point relates to that matter. We have created a monster that has now come back to haunt us, in that the subsidy regime encourages the movement of animals in a foolhardy way. At the moment, we have not dealt with that. We have to deal with the fact that people make money by operating this process—whether at the behest of the supermarkets or because of what the industry has become—and that they are being encouraged to do so by the subsidy regime, through bed and breakfasting or through the way in which the common agricultural policy encourages animal movements.

Mr. Wiggin: I am listening to the hon. Gentleman's argument. He has described farmers as reckless for moving sheep—those are his words—but now he suggests that the blame lies not with the farmers, but with the subsidy-driven system and the rules under which farming is governed, which contain loopholes that encourage people to benefit from sheep movements. Unfortunately, he cannot have it both ways. Not for one second do I believe that people who are moving sheep around the country are reckless; they are living with

market forces. Does he really think that the Government cannot control how subsidies are paid, except through this Bill?

Mr. Drew: I am not saying that at all, and the hon. Gentleman is doing my argument a disservice. In the main, I would call the people involved dealers, although some farmers are dealers, and the recklessness relates to the number of times that the animals are moved. I am also arguing that people are encouraged to do this by the subsidy regime that has been put in place. I would remove that subsidy regime tomorrow, but, unfortunately, that would have to go through European negotiations. Clearly, other parts of Europe undertake such movements more successfully in that they have not encountered the same number of breakdowns as us. However, they should learn from our mistakes, which is why, in essence, we need restrictions until we have dealt with that problem.

What is wrong with the amendment from the other place? I could understand the point of it if it provided some discretion, but it would allow a time scale of only eight weeks, come what may. To me, that would be the most unrestrictive restriction possible.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I am puzzling over the allegation that, somehow, the subsidy system prompts movements; I am having difficulty following it. I realise that hill farmers and sheep farmers receive an area payment and that there is a sheep annual premium payment, but I do not understand how that encourages them to move animals about.

Mr. Drew: It depends on how the animals are counted and who counts them. We know that in certain parts of Europe—between the Republic and Northern Ireland, for example—sheep are moved to derive the benefits of subsidy. The figures may be exaggerated, but anyone who knows anything about that part of the world knows that it is notorious for such exploitation. The figures for the mainland may also be exaggerated, but the people I talk to lead me to believe that they are not. Some people make a living in this way, although I would much prefer that not to be the case. That is why I say that, until we can deal with the problem, we must be able to put restrictions in place.

I speak rather a lot about bovine TB, because it is an ever-present worry in my constituency. The linkage occurs, I am led to believe, inasmuch as some work that the expert group is undertaking is considering cattle-to-cattle transfer, which also depends entirely on how regularly cattle are moved, who buys them and which parts of the country they go to. Unless we acknowledge that we must have some restrictions in place, the worry will be not just foot and mouth, but other diseases that we must also face up to. There is room for compromise here. We need a more realistic figure, as eight weeks is unrealistic.

7.15 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The hon. Gentleman is very generous in giving way. I tend to agree about the eight weeks and the drafting of the Lords amendment is unfortunate, but should not the Government introduce a compromise solution? I am sure he agrees that continuing a 20-day rule long into the future will render livestock farming in upland areas virtually unviable.

Mr. Drew: I agree. If I read what the Minister said correctly and given that the Government are trying to base their response on science, they are taking particular account of the Follett report, although they have also taken account of the Anderson report, which considered the practicalities. The Minister will no doubt come back on the point, but clearly he will consider the cost-benefit analysis, which will be principally a scientific evaluation. If and when it is possible to change the 20-day rule, let us change it, because it is causing my farmers some grief, although not to the extent of that faced by farmers in upland areas, even though such grief is part and parcel of how they earn their living.

I reiterate that we must keep learning from what went wrong until we can deal with the adverse consequences and we must have those protections in place. It may not be foot and mouth next time, but it could be something else. We must protect the people whom we want to keep in farming. They understand all that, even though they are finding it very hard in the short run.

Mr. Roger Williams: First, I draw the House's attention to my entries in the Register of Members' Interests involving livestock farming. It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who was a fellow sufferer on the Standing Committee a long, long time ago, as well as a thoughtful and open-minded person about agriculture.

The Minister said that it is a great pity that the amendment was passed by the other place, but he will accept that it represents recognition of the despair and despondency in the livestock industry resulting from the continuing imposition of the 20-day rule. It is more than a year since the last confirmed case of foot and mouth and nearly a year since Britain was declared free of the disease, so farmers are concerned that we still have one of the most rigorous forms of control that they have ever experienced. They are concerned not just because such control causes them difficulty in running their businesses, but because the evidence on which the rule was imposed has never been made clear to them.

The Minister referred to evidence from the chief veterinary officer and other scientific advisers, but farmers always complain to me that there is no logic or rationale behind the 20-day rule, except, of course—we all understand this—that reducing the number of animal movements reduces the chance of disease being spread. Everybody accepts that and the fact that we cannot return to pre-foot and mouth times. There will be regulations and some form of control. As has been said, the NFU also accepts that.

Such is the absolute despair of farmers, particularly in the area that I represent, that 200 of them met one night last week in Brecon market and decided to travel down to the National Assembly the next day for a symbolic burning of licence forms and applications. Quite honestly, those farmers have plenty to do, so that is an example of the exasperation that they feel over the controls. They believe that there is a disproportionate burden on the livestock industry, because the risk lies not in the industry—this is foot and mouth-clear

[Mr. Roger Williams]

country—but at the point of entry at ports and airports.—*[Interruption.]* The Minister disagrees, although I am grateful for today's announcement by the Secretary of State that the Government will reconsider how responsibility is exercised by Customs and Excise. One authority would certainly achieve greater co-operation over intelligence to be used at such points of entry. Farmers still believe that the controls are disproportionate. That, for them, is the crux of the issue.

The hon. Member for Stroud talked about dealers. It seems to me that the main burden of such regulation is falling on farmers. Dealers often run large and sophisticated businesses. They operate from a number of locations and sites, and they also have a number of holding areas, so they can circumvent the 20-day rule without breaking it. The rule has little effect on the family operation, although it has great effect on the family farmer. I shall give examples of how family farmers have found it difficult to operate.

Last weekend, I was approached by two constituents. J.W. Hammond and Sons is a farming business in my constituency, run by a man with his two sons and their families. They operate from a number of farms, but they have a well-integrated and sustainable method of production: they produce hardy ewes on one farm, and the lambs and breeding ewes are passed to other farms. DEFRA has told them that they must have only one holding, which means that when they buy stock for a farm that is 15 miles away from another they cannot move that stock. Because they have accepted DEFRA's advice, it is impossible for them to continue a well-thought-out and efficient operation that produces good stock. Unless the 20-day rule is changed, they will be unable to continue.

I was approached by another young farmer who had just taken on a tenancy. We want to encourage people like him to join an industry in which I think the average age is well into the fifties. He told me that because he had been unable to move 20 cattle, he would lose an extensification premium that was a key part of his cash flow and the profitability of his farm.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I, too, could give examples from my constituency illustrating the problem of the 20-day rule, but there is a further confusion in Wales. It has been announced today that there will be a review in February, but the hon. Gentleman's colleague, Mike German, announced that it would take place in Wales in January. Does that suggest that Mr. German does not have a grip on the situation, or that he needs more time to fill in his credit card slips?

Mr. Williams: I do not accept either suggestion, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for leading me to my next point.

Farmers are fed up because it is going to take so long to complete the risk assessment and the cost-benefit analysis. We are told that the preliminary results will be produced in November, and that there may be some relaxation and modification of the restriction in February. It appears that the full results will not be known until June. Many vets have suggested to me that the process could be accelerated. Does the Minister think there is any way of putting the results in the public domain more quickly, allowing us to conduct a thorough study?

I took a number of farmers on a delegation to meet Lord Whitty, but I also took the head of animal movements from Powys county council's trading standards department. He told Lord Whitty that any restriction of movements must be one with which farmers could comply, otherwise the whole arrangement would be brought into disrepute. We have been told that a number of people have directly abused the system. Many farmers have told me, almost in confessional mode, that they believe they have broken the regulations, but because those regulations are so complex they do not understand what is required of them. I ask the Minister to speed up the process and produce clear guidelines allowing farmers to continue their business.

Paul Flynn: What unites us is a desire to avoid the dreadful human and animal suffering that took place during the foot and mouth epidemic, but the Government must stand firm. The recommendation of the best scientists, of the Royal Society and the Anderson report, was not for a 20-day but for a 28-day standstill, because that represents the incubation period of the disease. The Government have already been conciliatory. They have made a compromise in that instance, and in a number of others.

Let us look at the risks. No one dreamt up the threat of blue tongue virus; it is spread by vectors, but it is a deadly disease that could destroy a third of our livestock, as it has elsewhere.

Mr. Roger Williams: I know that the hon. Gentleman is an expert on blue tongue disease, but has it not been absent from Wales since 1997, when Wales last had a Conservative Member of Parliament?

Paul Flynn: The disease is certainly alien to our shores. Conservative Members are similarly alien to Wales, and long may that last. But we are now being warned that because of climatic and other changes, blue tongue virus is a serious threat. There are other diseases too, such as vesicular stomatitis, which is similar to foot and mouth, and there is the possibility of vesicular swine fever. The threat is real, and is not being exaggerated.

Nevertheless, the farming industry should know that we are looking at the reality of the spread of foot and mouth. I know that the Opposition parties are wedded to the idea that it was all the Government's fault, but they should look at the map showing movements all over the country before the disease was detected. We can see the spread from the far north to Devon, and from the east to Wales. That is why we had a problem that was not experienced in Uruguay, in the Netherlands, in Ireland or in France. In fact, the outbreak in Ireland was caused by the illegal import of an animal to Northern Ireland.

It cannot be ignored that all sorts of people—people in the farming industry, for instance, and civil servants—turned a blind eye to illegal movements by those wishing to increase the number of claims for subsidies.

Mr. Simon Thomas: What the hon. Gentleman is describing constitutes fraud. If it was fraud, it should be investigated by the police. The 20-day rule does not help when people are behaving illegally.

Will the hon. Gentleman at least accept that the disease was able to spread so quickly because it had been introduced into the country in the first place? Will he accept that our primary responsibility must be to prevent it from coming in, and to adopt bio-preventive measures to ensure that the spread is contained if it does ever come in?

Paul Flynn: It was fraud, but both Governments turned a blind eye on the pretext that it had happened elsewhere in Europe and they could see no reason why there should not be a multiplication of subsidies here. As for stopping the disease at source, I am afraid that that is another myth. It came here because one farmer did not pre-heat the swill he was using; if he had followed proper advice, he would not have used the swill anyway.

It is also absurd to think that we can build a wall around the country and keep out any contraband. Despite the heroic efforts of Customs and Excise, billions of cigarettes and thousands of gallons of alcohol are smuggled in, as well as a huge amount of illegal drugs. There is no way of ensuring that the country can remain free of illegal or bad meat.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I spent several hours with Customs and Excise in Dover yesterday. In fact, it has reduced illegal tobacco imports from £1.7 billion to £400 million worth in the last few months. Moreover, the hon. Gentleman has identified a contrast that no one else is seriously identifying. The Minister tried to do the same. I do not think that any Member on either side of the House has suggested an open-door policy enabling anyone to bring in anything at any time, or a hermetically sealed country. We are certainly not suggesting either. We are saying that a higher profile can change the mindset of most of the people who are engaging in such action, many of whom are doing so innocently. That can be seen in Australia and the United States.

7.30 pm

Paul Flynn: That was an extremely helpful intervention as it makes the point that whatever we do we cannot stop imports coming in and bringing diseases into the country. So what should we do? The farming industry is reluctant to do anything as it is set in its ways. Farmers want to do their job in the same way as their parents and grandparents, but they must understand that this rule must stay. There is an easy, simple, cheaper alternative that has already been used. That is to use the methods that were used during the foot-and-mouth epidemic whereby animals were sold directly or through simple technology such as video links and the internet. That method avoids the expense of taking animals to market and the journeys and the animals can pass from farm to farm or to the slaughterhouse or where ever else they are going without contact with other animals. That is what we should all be encouraging.

Mr. Wiggin: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that even with the 20-day rule, disease can be transmitted through illegal acts, so that although the more rules the Government make, the more likely it is in theory that disease will be prevented, what really happens is that law-abiding farmers go out of business, and farmers who break the law continue to spread disease. The weakness in the 20-day rule, which has value directly after an outbreak, is that it will put law-abiding farmers and livestock markets out of business and affect the infrastructure on which all farmers depend to earn a living. Does the hon. Gentleman not see that even if the Government insist on it, the bad guys will continue to break the law?

Paul Flynn: I am following the best advice of the two bodies that I mentioned. No one made any suggestion that they were wrong in suggesting this essential deterrent.

I represent farmers and there were three outbreaks of foot and mouth in my constituency, but my constituents are overwhelmingly industrial workers who work mainly in the steel and aluminium industry. They have suffered terribly in the past two years and more than half their jobs have disappeared. All those families contributed £5 per week last year to pay for foot and mouth, in addition to the £10 per week they pay the farming industry in subsidies. If another disease comes along, is it reasonable that taxpayers—including the steel and aluminium workers in my constituency—should pick up the bill? If the farming industry is not prepared to take these sensible, modest precautions, why on earth should taxpayers pick up the bill for the next epidemic?

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I am not sure whether or not it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), who has clearly missed his vocation. He should have been a 19th-century non-conformist Welsh preacher predicting Armageddon—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is."] Perhaps he is. He reminds me of a character from a Dylan Thomas poem. I think it was Organ Morgan, but hon. Members will correct me if I am wrong. I should stress to the hon. Gentleman that Opposition Members are not against having some form of movement restriction—we are simply opposed to the particular restriction.

Let me begin by doing a Conservative thing and defending the dealers. We have had a lot of mud slung at the dealers in the course of the debate so far. Dealers are perfectly respectable people; they are simply using the market. The way that the livestock market has developed in the United Kingdom has encouraged the intervention of dealers. The reason is that we have a very large number of centralised meatpacking firms or abattoirs that require large numbers of animals on a regular basis. They get them from dealers who collect them from different parts of the country. Dealers make a turn on the price while fulfilling the needs of the abattoirs for a regular supply of animals. For better or worse, that is where we are with the market.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that he will agree with me that it is one of the structural problems of the industry that we have a concentration of livestock and a concentration of kill within abattoirs purely at the behest of the large supermarkets and their demands on the industry. We have to address that at some stage.

Mr. Atkinson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it has to do with the structure of the industry, but I am not sure whether we can change it. What the

[Mr. Atkinson]

hon. Gentleman is saying is the equivalent of suggesting that we ought to scrap large car plants and that all motor cars should be built in small back-street garages as they were in past centuries. The meat processing business is hugely capital intensive, requiring people working 365 days a year in two shifts. That is the way it is. A meat-packing plant in the hon. Gentleman's part of the country will eventually have to source lamb from my constituency in the north of England. That is a feature of the industry. Whether or not it is desirable, it is not easy to change. The dealers are providing for modern economics.

The Minister was critical of the amendment and I do not believe it is a particularly good one, but it provides us with an opportunity to debate a serious matter that is affecting farmers in my constituency very badly. It gives us the opportunity of expressing our concerns, hopefully in a vote. The Minister said that a large proportion of the livestock industry can cope with these regulations, but many farmers cannot. We have heard tonight that upland farmers in particular will find it extremely difficult. Certainly in the north of England, in the Pennines, the livestock buying and selling year is contracted into September and October. It has a very tight span. Farmers who breed sheep and suckler cows need to move breeding replacements on to the farm and to sell lambs and ewes at the autumn sales. If animal movements are restricted, those farmers have to hold stock on their farms which means extra expense and if the weather is particularly bad—fortunately it was not too bad this autumn—it would cause welfare problems. These are enormous costs to farmers who are already struggling. At the risk of being slightly out of order, farmers are facing not only the economic problems caused by the 20-day rule but the economic problems caused by the slowness of the Rural Payments Agency to pay up and the muddle caused by so many mistakes at the British Cattle Movement Service in Workington which means that cattle which are going into the over-30-months scheme are now being disqualified because of administrative errors that are not their fault. Perhaps the Minister will look at that in due course.

As I said, we accept the need for a traceability scheme and that would be the final answer. We also accept the need for some form of movement restriction, but it has to be very much more relaxed than it is currently. Farmers have suffered this autumn; they do not want to suffer next autumn. It is absolutely imperative that whatever scheme the Minister introduces, it must be properly in place early in the year so that the spring movement of livestock from winter quarters to summer quarters can begin. In particular it must be up and working at the end of the next back-end season.

Other suggestions have been made which the Minister did not consider for long enough. The simple scheme produced by auctioneers whereby farmers have three dyes and dye sheep with one colour one week, the next colour the following week and another for the third week means that no animal can be sold or brought to market until it has reached the three-week period. That is an incredibly simple system which would have carried us over until a proper system was put in place.

Let me reiterate that the real cost of this 20-day movement restriction falls on a particularly vulnerable group of farmers. While they all appreciate that some form of movement is needed, they need a more liberal regime, which will allow them at least to hang on to their lives and their work for a few more years.

Mr. Curry: Perhaps we can first get one or two historical facts in place. The movement of livestock is not some sort of modern aberration; it is at the absolute heart of the agricultural economy throughout Europe. Transhumance is one of the oldest practices of the human race. I refer the House to one of the great books—Ferdinand Braudel's "The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II". Although not particularly imaginative, Phillip II was an assiduous and meticulous monarch who ruled a very large empire. The culture of the Mediterranean world is based on the principle of transhumance, so let us get away from the idea that a bunch of wicked dealers have intruded on a pastoral scene characterised by William Cobbett, and brought it kicking and screaming into a bizarre modern world.

Let us also be clear that the consequences of the foot and mouth epidemic highlighted the importance of such movements, which are traditional, rather than bizarre movements designed to rig the system. When foot and mouth struck in my constituency, animals that had been sent to the lowlands to over-winter should have been coming back up to the hill. In fact, they could not be moved—they were caught in fields full of mud. In Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, where some farmers specialise in looking after animals over the winter, the resulting welfare conditions were serious. Of course, the sale of breeding stock off the hills forms part of the backbone of the uplands economy, and it is also one of the major sources of livestock for the lowlands. Those are traditional movements that are intrinsic to agriculture, and we have to find a way in which to accommodate them.

I should point out to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) that I realise that, in many ways, auction marts must appear to be some sort of Dickensian throwback—part of the world of "One Man and His Dog", or a television series about vets. However, in the light of his concerns and comments, he should not underestimate the role of the auction mart in combating the social exclusion experienced by those who live remote lives. They do not often meet their fellow human beings, and they derive benefit from meeting in the fug of the fish and chip shop or the pie shop.

Paul Flynn: During the recess, I visited Llanrwst market, which is outside my constituency, and spoke to the farmers assembled there. The strongest argument that they made in favour of the continuation of the mart was that it was the day on which families came to Llanrwst for social reasons. One understands that entirely, but there must be some way to improve their social life and reduce their isolation other than by getting animals together in a traditional but very dangerous way.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman and I may not be very far apart. In practice, we will see a more integrated

food chain, farmers contracting to retailers, and the pre-selection of animals, which go straight to the abattoirs. In fact, some auction marts are acting as intermediaries in order to organise that trade. So the role of the auction mart is changing.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Is it not true that, when we get to that stage, many of the Members who complained about dealers will be complaining that we do not have dealers any longer, and saying how much better things were in those days? One cannot ever get it right.

Mr. Curry: That is certainly true, and they will also complain that they have received planning application for the building of 93 desirable houses on the site of the auction mart, including a complement of social housing, which will doubtless occasion concern for other parts of the village. I speak from some experience, but I shall not go further down that route.

We should also admit that there were dreadful examples of negligence during the foot and mouth outbreak. In North Yorkshire, many farmers have several scattered holdings. Indeed, the Department found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that many farmers owned plots of land that were quite close together, but not contiguous. Some of those farmers moved stock from one farm to the other without any semblance of precaution. That was clearly criminal in spirit, if not in practice. The miracle of the foot and mouth outbreak was that the disease never reached the pig herds in Humberside. Had it done so, we would have got into vaccination to slaughter. The sheer volume of slaughter could have been coped with and brought under order only by the introduction of vaccination.

7.45 pm

I make those preliminary points because I want to ensure that the Minister, for whom I have a lot of respect, understands the issue. I know his brief, and I also know how difficult it is under the 20-day rule to operate normal farming practice on a mixed beef and sheep farm in the uplands. People have to move animals around—to market, to pasture—and the high hills will not sustain them throughout the year. There are also practical problems. The Minister has said that there has to be a form of cordon sanitaire around a holding, but one cannot establish an isolation unit with a 50 m boundary for 300 sheep on a hill farm. In practice, it is very difficult to deliver that and then service the sheep with the tup.

As I pointed out to the Minister, under the problematic anomalies of the 20-day rule, I could buy 300 sheep and put them in a field next to sheep owned by my neighbour. If we are lucky, there are dry-stone walls and the sheep will not mingle. However, it is just as likely that the sheep will be separated by a few strands of wire, so they will mingle and converse, as it were. My neighbour, who is not caught by any restriction, could immediately sell off sheep that had been in contact with restricted sheep. Equally, in some cases the rule has the perverse impact of promoting the use of dealers. Let us consider the example of a farmer in Cumbria or North Yorkshire, who used to be able to buy young calves in the autumn from various local farms in a 40 mile radius. All those farms are now caught by the same restrictions as he is, so the way to get round that is to buy the animals from a dealer who is shipping them from 250 miles away. In other words, the farmer is actually forced into an alternative pattern of procurement. According to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), that increases exposure to the transmission of illness.

In making my final point, I shall use the example, if I may, of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). Farmer Gummer and I can both send our sheep to market, and the sheep can sit in adjacent pens in the auction mart. As we know, they are mere tubular structures, and communication can take place between pens. Let us say that I decide to buy Farmer Gummer's sheep, and I take them home. As long as I put them in an isolation unit, I will not be caught by the restriction. However, if I do not sell my sheep and I want to take them home, they will be caught by the 20-day rule—even though they have been in contact only with Farmer Gummer's sheep—and I will be unable to sell them on.

I appreciate that there are bound to be such anomalies; it is very difficult to establish schemes without them. However, in talking about trying to get the farming community to accept the necessity of restrictions, it is important to ensure that farmers cannot say, "Hang on, has anybody who has devised the restrictions thought about how we practise in reality—how we live and get through the working day?" As my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) pointed out, the scheme in Scotland operates somewhat differently. I accept that those differences are in the detail, but the regime is slightly more liberal in respect of, for example, applications for licences. There is spot-checking, as opposed to the prior approvals that have to be obtained in England. In Scotland, any animal can be put into segregation without triggering the provision; in England, however, only breeding animals can qualify under that criterion.

As a result of devolution, practices are diverging. Premium payments are now different on the two sides of the border, because the British Government—on behalf of England and Wales—decided to retain an element of the payment for a general kitty. That decision was not taken in Scotland, however. I imagine that that rule could be modified for Scotland under the powers of devolution, so that it becomes more different from that which applies in England. The argument would then arise of level playing fields within these shores, rather than simply between these shores and elsewhere.

I agree that the Lords amendment is not particularly well thought out, but it has served its purpose by enabling us to bring to the Minister's attention the practical problems experienced by farmers who want to make the system work, who are not out to dodge the system, and who have been through a tremendously rough time.

In my constituency, the second worst category of farmer was those whose animals got foot and mouth disease; the worst category was those whose animals did not because they could not move their cattle or earn a living, and the sheep were sucking the stones dry on the hills. Those farmers are now entering a further period of severe restrictions.

[Mr. Curry]

The Minister should spell out the programme and the scenarios that he hopes to be able to apply and acknowledge that he may want to retain some form of permanent restrictions, but ones that go with the grain of farming practices. He should show that he is seeking, as is inevitable across the field of such activities, to find the balance between the necessary precaution and enabling the industry that he is seeking to preserve to be able to continue to earn a living so that it can help to preserve itself.

Mr. Simon Thomas: It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who has just given some very good examples that are particularly pertinent to upland Wales, which experiences the anomalies and some of the perverse incentives in the present system that work against what many Labour Members have talked about tonight.

On behalf of Plaid Cymru, I want to make it clear at the outset that we find the amendment to be particularly awful in its drafting. Nevertheless, it has given us a useful opportunity to debate this vital issue and the way in which it is affecting farmers, particularly those in Wales and England, but not so much those in Scotland. It gives us an opportunity to raise a very basic principle about how we will cope in the future not only with the spread of foot and mouth, but its introduction into the United Kingdom.

Plaid Cymru strongly supports the principle of movement control. We must know what is happening to the movement of agricultural animals in this country. We must know where the animal is, where it has been and its intervening journey. However, there has been much talk in the debate about movement restrictions, and I should like to draw a distinction.

The term "restrictions" suggests a predetermination of the cost-benefit analysis that will be done on the 20-day rule. It suggests that people already accept that farming must be restricted in that way. An alternative should be considered and certainly thoroughly analysed whereby animal movements are controlled using the detailed information that we have on those animals. The case has been made powerfully that, certainly after the foot and mouth outbreak in the north of England, it was not just the movement of animals that created difficulties, but the fact that people did not know where those animals had been, how they had been kept and the way that biosecurity measures had been applied to them.

I accept that things must be very different in future, but we have to go with the grain of farming practice, as the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon said. There has been a lot of talk this evening and outside the House about movements and restrictions that simply do not go with the grain of farming practice and therefore will not work because people will not want to follow them, or because they will go out of business if they do follow them.

We must remember that the two inquiry reports that have been much mentioned in the debate said that the 20-day rule should apply until the cost-benefit analysis has been carried out. In response to a question that I asked during today's statement, the Secretary of State made it clear that that cost-benefit analysis would include alternatives to the 20-day rule. I welcome that, and I hope that that will be clear.

What are the principles in applying any sort of movement control? First, we must prevent disease in the first place. Secondly, we must deal with the spread of disease if it were ever to occur. The main priority for preventing disease is, of course, stopping it coming into the country in the first place. We have heard some messages of doom and gloom and been told that we cannot stop disease or illegal imports, but the fact is that the Government have not been doing enough on illegal meat imports. Only now is there a realisation of the need to take co-ordinated action. That must be the main priority.

Of course if disease comes into the country, we must consider how to stop or at least limit its spread. Plainly, we must therefore consider not only the 20-day rule, but the whole question of biosecurity. That is the key. Good biosecurity being practised on all farms at all times will limit the spread of any disease, whatever it is. Some diseases are more virulent than others. The problem in the west Wales dairy industry at the moment is TB, not blue tongue or foot and mouth.

Any restriction, control or measure that we place on farming has to be proportionate to its ability to meet it practically and financially. The income of each upland farmer in Wales was about £4,200 last year, so they do not have much scope to invest in any system or to bear its costs.

The hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) is very keen to remind everyone of the massive subsidy—£10 a week—that every family pays to each farmer, but that money does not go into farmers' pockets. Their pockets were not stuffed full of those tenners in Llanrwst, and he knows it. The money goes into the wasteful, awful common agricultural policy. Farmers do not want to be part of that any more than we do, but that is the price that we pay for cheap food—the second or third cheapest food in the developed world.

The fact is that the consumer does not really pay the price of their food; they pay in a round about way. Not only do they pay when they go into the supermarket or shop and pay 40p, 37p, or whatever, for a pint of milk; they pay subsidy as well. So we in this country pay for our food twice if not three times over. If we want a better relationship between farmers and consumers and to make this aspect of the Bill work better, the price of biosecurity on food has to be included at the consumer end. It is not just the farmers who bear the weight; the consumer has to face the real cost of food production as well.

Paul Flynn: Has the hon. Gentleman seen the report by the Consumers Association stating that a basket of food was bought in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand and that it was discovered that the price in New Zealand was half the price here? Farmers in New Zealand have not had any subsidy for the past 16 years.

Mr. Thomas: If there is so much waste in the CAP, food prices will decline, but I was making the point—the hon. Gentleman has to accept this—that the consumer

does not just pay for food when he or she goes into a supermarket; they pay through their taxes for the CAP as well, and reforming the CAP is the key.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: The hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) mentions New Zealand, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will know that in New Zealand the grass grows 12 months a year, so cattle can stay out all year and do not need to be fed inside. Of course that makes New Zealand products much cheaper.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning that aspect of farming, which the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon also mentioned.

If we are to encourage farmers to go more directly to market, which is part of the answer to dealing with foot and mouth, by cutting away all the wasteful journey times, we have to ensure that farmers are able to market more directly by moving livestock. We cannot take livestock movements out of the market. Some of the dealers may be slightly less than above board, but they generally meet the requirements of the market.

The largest abattoir just outside my constituency—it is in that of my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price)—Oriel Jones in Llanybydder, meets the demands of the supermarkets. The input into that abattoir is more than the local market can bear, so dealers must feed that abattoir. That is part of a wider question, but it is wrong to place on farmers the whole pressure of biosecurity under the 20-day rule. My concern is that farmers may bear all that pressure, but we should consider the wider context of how to ensure that the whole of the farming industry is safe, clean and free from disease.

Mr. Wiggin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that not only are farmers expected to bear the costs, but, given the implications of some of the comments made by Labour Members, they are to blame for the entire foot and mouth outbreak? It simply cannot be the case that the disease was imported by the farming community in the first place.

Mr. Thomas: I certainly reject any suggestion that farming was to blame for the disease entering the country in the first place, but legitimate farming practices, approved by the Government and previous Governments for many years, may have exacerbated the disease. There is a lesson to be learned, but nevertheless they were legitimate practices.

I well remember the astonishment when the Government announced that X million journeys were made by animals during two or three weeks and everyone took a breath as they thought that that practice was illegal and that a scandal had been found. Did they not know that that happened all the time and that it was a natural part of farming practice? As the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon said, farmers in Wales have moved livestock around not just for years, decades or centuries, but for millennia. In Wales, the drovers' roads, some of which we still travel on to get to the House, follow the path taken from my constituency to London. Cattle, geese, pigs and sheep were moved around the country. That is nothing new, and it is a vital part of farming. As the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said, the environment and climate in Wales are not suitable for year-round farming.

8 pm

I hope that the Minister will accept that some movement of animals is part of sustainable farming practice. If we want to ensure that artificial fertilisers, pesticides and feed are not used—and we must remember the feedstocks that are used in America, the other place where food is cheapest—we must support sustainable farming. An element of animal movement is part of that.

Paul Flynn: Animal movements take place in Uruguay, the Netherlands, France and Ireland, but the disease did not spread in those countries as it did here. Will the hon. Gentleman accept that excessive and unnecessary animal movements take place in this country, and that only the 20-day rule will eliminate them?

Mr. Thomas: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in asking for the reopening of local slaughterhouses. They have been going down like nine pins in my constituency. I agree with the central point, but in his comments this evening the hon. Gentleman has put the responsibility for the outbreak directly on farmers. The problem is much more complex. There is a whole industry, driven by the retail side, which affects what happens.

Adam Price: We are discussing a Bill about animal health, and there is an animal welfare aspect to the problems caused by the delay. Of necessity, upland farmers need to trade stored animals. Any delay could cause animal welfare problems because of the lack of food and shelter. That has a knock-on effect in terms of the availability of food for breeding stock.

Mr. Thomas: I agree. My constituency was not directly affected by foot and mouth, but some areas were restricted. I had an awful case involving a farmer who could not move stock because of restrictions, even though the RSPCA was investigating what was going on.

Mr. Gummer: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he was far too kind to the hon. Member for Newport West, (Paul Flynn)? Although the movements of animals in this country may be rather longer than they would be in an ideal world, there could be no fewer movements if we returned to the system that the hon. Member for Newport describes. Movement is part of the normal way of dealing with animals. It is only the ignorance of people locked up in towns that causes them not to understand that.

Mr. Thomas: I shall not reiterate the points that the right hon. Gentleman has made. There is a saying in Wales that we knock the gatepost for the gate to hear: I hope that the hon. Member for Newport West, heard what the right hon. Gentleman said.

I shall conclude by enumerating the basics that should underpin the debate. First, we need to prevent disease coming to the country in the first place. That is primarily a matter of dealing with illegal meat imports and production. There have been of cases of meat being produced illegally for the smokies trade in west Wales and London. That is a real concern of mine.

[Mr. Thomas]

Secondly, if disease breaks out again, we must ensure that it does not spread. That is a matter of biosecurity in the farming industry, which must be constant, rather than a one-off response to disease. We must identify the animals that have been moved around, and where they have been moved to, which means that we must have a proper animal movement identification system. If disease is present, we must deal with the animals involved, and contiguous animals. We debated earlier whether the best way to do that was by culling or vaccination. I support movement control, but it can be achieved only in co-operation with the industry and farmers, and only if it does not destroy or undermine the livestock industry. After all, we do not want the countryside to be free of disease if that means that we have to import all our meat, do we?

Mr. Morley: With the leave of the House, I should like to respond to the debate.

Lords amendment No. 45 is important. It is inevitable that the House will want to concentrate on it, given the interest in the 20-day animal movement limit. The Government accept the main thrust of the amendment. We want to make some small technical changes, which I shall explain in a moment.

The hon. Members for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), and my hon. Friends the Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) all made fair points about the impact of animal movements on the industry. They accepted the need for movements, which the Government recognise, but all speakers conceded that some movements have to be stopped as one of a range of a disease control measures.

The question is where that stop should fall, which is why an independent assessment is being conducted. The House of Lords asked for time to consider the independent reports, so I am surprised that their lordships have ignored their recommendations. That is why I am asking the House to reject this amendment. It has been useful as a platform for debate, but it does not really add to the Bill. It is inappropriate, and we should wait for the proper assessment as we continue the debate with industry.

The Government do not disagree with the arguments advanced in the other place that biosecurity must apply to everyone in the livestock industry. It must include the Department's staff, contractors, hauliers and everyone who goes on to farms. However, we have two small differences of opinion when it comes to the amendment.

First, it is unnecessary to make specific provision that the Secretary of State must send final guidance on biosecurity to those persons and organisations listed in the amendment's compliance provisions, which are very specific. It is a standard requirement for the Department that written consultations are sent out to such persons or organisations as the Secretary of State considers to be representative. The provision is worded in broad terms in the Government's proposal, so that the Secretary of State is not unnecessarily restricted. For example, the Secretary of State might want to seek the views of vets or scientists. They do not fall within the very strictly defined categories in proposed new subsection 6B(5).

Secondly, proposed new subsection 6B(1) deals with the distribution of guidance to all those listed in proposed new section 6A(3). It is significant, because it would mean that the exercise by the Government of functions under this legislation would be unlawful if the Government, for whatever reason, did not distribute guidance to all those listed, regardless of whether the guidance was relevant or applicable to them.

Clearly, it would not be acceptable for the Government to have their power to act removed in that way for failing to distribute guidance to everyone on the list. There is always someone who might claim that they did not receive the guidance. The list is so specific and narrowly defined that it would leave the Government open to all sorts of difficulties.

That is not to say that the Government are against distributing information and guidance. We are committed to openness and transparency, and to communicating relevant information about all policies and about the proportionate action that we would take to prevent the spread of animal disease.

That is why we have ensured that the requirement already in the Bill to publish the biosecurity guidance will ensure that it is available to all the people, organisations, and stakeholder representatives who need to know about it. We want to make sure that people get the information, but the amendment is unduly restrictive.

I hope that the House will accept the minor amendment that the Government propose.

Mr. Hayes: With the leave of the House, I shall say a word about biosecurity. As the Minister said, we did not debate it at the start of the discussion of this group of amendments. However, it seems to be linked intrinsically with the 20-day rule, as I said earlier. In many ways, preventing animals from spreading foot and mouth has to go hand in hand with the dispersal of information among everyone who might have contact with livestock during a disease crisis.

That was the subject of consideration in the other place. The Lords was determined to ensure that the information was comprehensible, coherent, and distributed as widely as possible. If people are going to make lots of movements in and out of infected areas that requires them to be informed about risk as fully and well as possible. That is part of risk management, as the Minister acknowledged in his brief remarks. However, the Lords would like a specific list of organisations that the Secretary of State is obliged to contact on biosecurity measures. The Minister said that that is standard practice, that it is done all the time, and that he was sure that the Secretary of State would use her judgment. That is fine and good, but I think that the Lords are right in saying that distributing and publishing such information and sending out draft material needs to be specified clearly in the Bill. To that end, we support the Lords amendment.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 283, Noes 178.

Division No. 356] **[8:10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wans)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*

Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and Derek Twigg

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Chris Grayling and Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

It being three and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings, Mr Deputy Speaker *put the remaining Question required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Amendments proposed to the Lords amendment No. 45: (a) and (b).

Question put, That the amendments be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 174.

Division No. 357] **[8:23 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*

Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and Derek Twigg

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Stephen

Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Chris Grayling and
Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 45, as amended, agreed to [Special Entry].

Clause 6

TREATMENT: POWER OF ENTRY

Lords amendment: No. 14.

Mr. Morley: I beg to move amendment (a) to the Lords amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 15 to 21, 22 and Government amendment (a) thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 23 to 29, 35 and Government amendment (a) thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 36 to 42, 65 and Government amendment (a) thereto and Lords amendments Nos. 66 to 72.

Mr. Morley: The amendments deal with warrant provisions. In the other place, the Government accepted a series of changes to warrant provisions that reflect the concerns expressed about powers of entry under the measure.

We understand that the issue is sensitive and we would not use powers of entry unless there was justification for doing so. The main justification is the need to take swift and rapid action in order to prevent the spread of disease. The provisions were recommended in the independent reports to ensure that the Government can take speedy and effective action on disease control. These provisions cover entry to farms for the purposes of vaccination, slaughter, testing and sampling, and the scrapie provisions of the Bill.

The Government listened carefully to the arguments about the warrant conditions that were made in Committee, on Report and in another place. The Government amendments tabled in another place introduce further safeguards to reinforce substantially the conditions that must be satisfied before any warrant can be granted. Again, that is because we recognise the importance of the issue. Taken as a whole, the changes satisfy the need to ensure that the powers are subject to a rigorous and transparent test of reasonableness and that the overall balance of public interest takes proper account of the private interests and rights of farmers and landowners.

However, the Opposition amendments provide for representations to a magistrate; that would be legally unprecedented and unwelcome, in the sense that it would be difficult to make such a system work. The previous system also led to delays in some circumstances. There are no precedents in legislation for providing a right to make representations during the warrant-issuing process. I want to emphasise that.

If we were to allow representations to the magistrate, there would have to be a reasonable period in which to make them and the opportunity to seek legal advice before making them. That condition would have to be applied. The risk is that we would have further delays if the court then required additional or expert evidence, or if there were an application for legal aid. We cannot delay disease control by several hours, or even days in some cases, while this goes on. That would undermine one of the principles of the Bill. If we are to deal with disease control—whether by culling, vaccination or serology—we must get on with it as quickly and

effectively as possible. We will not do that by overriding people's rights, because the occupier does have the right to make representations to the divisional veterinary manager, as we discussed in Committee.

It may be worth noting that the final figures from the 2001 outbreak show that there were a total of 584 appeals against slaughter, of which all but four were dealt with by the local DVM. Of the 584 cases where animal owners challenged decisions to slaughter livestock, 534 were appealing against contiguous culls. In total, 376 of those appeals were upheld, 336 of which were appeals against contiguous culls.

I mention the figures because there has been a tendency for one or two people to say that appealing to the DVM will not get anyone far, as the DVM is part of the machinery of the process. However, the figures demonstrate that, during the 2001 outbreak, hundreds of people made appeals that were upheld. The request to review a decision to slaughter is an effective mechanism by which farmers are able to challenge such decisions. I recognise that it is not a formal appeal process, but it can lead to people making representations and to the decision being reconsidered. There are hundreds of examples of where that has been the case. I should emphasise, as I did in Committee, that the subsequent right to seek judicial review also remains.

Mr. Heath: The Under-Secretary is just coming to the important point of judicial review. Is not it also correct to say that a farmer could seek an injunction from the High Court for a stay of the operation until such time as the judicial review was held, which could create a much greater delay than the one the hon. Gentleman is trying to avoid by the process that he is describing?

Mr. Morley: That is a possibility, and I shall come to it in a moment. However, the processes are different, and it would be rather extreme to seek injunctions in such cases. It has been argued that the speed of the judicial review process might mean animals being vaccinated, blood-tested or culled. That is true; nevertheless the Department is still subject to that judicial review. That is a serious issue and one that the Department must take into account. We must make sure that whatever we do is proportionate and applied properly. Those legal rights remain. The hon. Gentleman is right in the sense that the Bill does not take away a farmer's right to seek a High Court injunction blocking the warrant. The warrant procedure also has fundamental safeguards built in, and the magistrate must always be satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for an inspector to enter the premises. That issue, too, was discussed in Committee. One cannot just ask for a warrant and expect to get it automatically: one must have a reasonable case to present to the magistrate to be granted that warrant.

Mr. Bacon: It is a relief to hear that the Government are not proposing to abolish judicial review of administrative action. The Under-Secretary described that as rather extreme, and it would be extreme if a farmer had to go to the High Court to get an injunction to stop the action before it had occurred. Is not the whole point of the amendment that simply being able to go before a justice of the peace and argue the toss at the time would obviate what he calls extreme?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman, who knows a thing or two about law, knows well that such duplication of the legal process does not currently exist. It would be unique in law to have such a procedure in front of a JP when seeking a warrant. There is no precedent for that, and it would have implications for the whole question of issuing warrants. That cannot be conceded, and he will recognise the reasons for that, too. In amending this part of the Bill, we are trying to reassure people that whatever measures are applied in the Bill, it is not just about culling, which people focus on because it is an emotional and important issue; it is about serology, taking samples and vaccination. I am absolutely certain that when applying some of these measures in future disease epidemics, a warrant will have to be sought in some cases to enter people's property to vaccinate and blood-test. I repeat to Members the example of one individual who delayed the lifting of restrictions in a whole region because he would not allow the Department to take blood samples from his goats on the grounds that it would upset them. That had far-reaching detrimental effects on the whole area. We therefore need measures for a range of techniques in terms of disease control, and culling is only one of them.

Andrew George: In that case, surely the Under-Secretary would want to avoid a situation in which a farmer might seek to use a much more lengthy legal process to delay the matter further. Given that he says that a reasonable case would need to be made to a magistrate, does he accept that the point of the original Lords amendment was that that reasonable case need not be one-sided, and that the facts about the farm from the farmer's perspective should be put to the magistrate, too?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman has returned to the problem that, if there is to be such a process, the Department may want its lawyers and vets to make a case, but the farmer may want to make his case, take legal advice, consult on his legal advice, and apply for legal aid. The delays would therefore go on and on. We need to avoid that while taking into account the issue of people's rights. That is what we are trying to do with the measure, as we have made significant changes during the passage of the Bill to take into account the concerns that people have raised. I appreciate that going for a High Court injunction could also cause a delay, but that is a much bigger step than going to the High Court, and I doubt whether many people would want to do that. It does not take away people's rights, however, which we cannot do in relation to seeking such an injunction—that right is not removed. We are trying to give people the right to appeal to DVMs, who know the local area and the local circumstances, and who, as I demonstrated, upheld the cases of hundreds of people who made representations to them during the last outbreak, all around the country. The system acknowledges that when a case needs to be taken into account and investigated, the DVM is prepared to do that.

8.45 pm

I also emphasise that the Joint Committee on Human Rights reported that the procedure for making

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representations to the DVM and with regard to existing legal rights is fair and does not contravene human rights. It stated that

"the provisions of the Bill are in principle unlikely to be incompatible with either the right in national law under ECHR Article 6(1) to a fair hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal in the determination of civil rights and obligations, or the right in international law to an effective remedy before a national authority for violations of Convention rights under ECHR Article 13."

That is unequivocal guidance. It is clear that the measures are considered fair and proportionate.

The provision for farmers to make representations to magistrates as part of the warrant process would be unprecedented. Hon. Members might recall that that was raised in Committee. I was not sure whether the procedure could be supported. However, after receiving proper legal advice and consulting other Departments, it is clear that the process would be unprecedented and make a fundamental change to the nature of warrant provisions.

Andrew George: On a technical matter, can the Minister clarify how the new procedure will work if the Government amendment is accepted? Will the farmer have a right to appeal to the DVM after a warrant has been granted?

Mr. Morley: That is an interesting point. It might be a bit late to appeal to a DVM after a warrant is issued. We want to ensure that farmers are aware of the provision and understand how to make representations to the DVM. That is dealt with in the slaughter protocol. I promised that we would include clear guidance on the procedures to be followed when culling policies are applied so that farmers are aware of their right to make representations to the DVM, so I can reassure the hon. Gentleman on that.

Mrs. Browning: The Minister will recall that in Committee I raised the legal basis on which he was introducing the Bill and suggested that it might be subject to legal challenge. I hear what he said about having taken legal advice. He will know that such things are ultimately challenged in the court, which ends up the determinant in such matters. However, I am glad that he took further legal advice and hope he understands the underlying concern—the gravity—with which people view the powers that he is taking to himself.

Mr. Morley: I understand that, but the way in which the powers will be exercised has been exaggerated. People have ignored the fact that a Minister will have to apply a power proportionately and responsibly. It is not possible simply to go and ask for a warrant; it is necessary to make the case and demonstrate why a warrant to go on someone's property is needed. The Department would not take the decision to apply for a warrant lightly and I am sure no magistrate would take the decision to grant a warrant lightly.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way; he is being patient with us as we try to understand the process. Having heard representations from a farmer, would the DVM be required to provide that information to the magistrate when seeking a warrant and proving the correctness or otherwise of an application? That would allow the magistrate to be in possession of information from people on both sides of the case when he makes an assessment. A response to that would help enormously in ascertaining whether the process is satisfactory.

Mr. Morley: On the detailed questions, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I am not a lawyer and I am careful not to offend lawyers—it can be an expensive business. People will have the right to make representations to the DVM. It would not be unreasonable for the magistrate to ask whether the farmer's representations had been taken into account. The magistrate would have the right to ask that. Of course, we are making sure that people are aware of their rights. It is entirely up to individuals whether they avail themselves of the right to appeal to the DVM, but it is a provision. As I outlined to the House, many hundreds of farmers did so and the DVM recognised and conceded the cases of many hundreds of farmers, which demonstrates that the system works and that, if people have a reasonable case, the DVM will take note of it and respond—the evidence is there for all to see.

Mrs. Browning: May I put to the Minister a case that was common during the foot and mouth outbreak? It concerns farms that were in a contiguous area and were due to be culled out, but the cull did not take place immediately. He kindly saw me about two farms in my constituency. In those cases, we had reached day 19 before they received notification that they were going to be culled out. Surely, it must be obvious to the DVM that that is unreasonable. As it happens, the four farms in my patch that fell into that category are still alive and doing well. However, when that sort of thing happens, unless a Member of Parliament or some other such person intervenes, orders can be executed in an unreasonable time frame.

Mr. Morley: That is not an unreasonable point. However, we are talking retrospectively about something that happened at the height of an epidemic, when there was a real need to get to grips with the situation and people were under enormous pressure. We have learned a lot of lessons from the epidemic. It would be very irresponsible of us had we not learned them and had we not recognised that there were things that we could do better. That is why the protocols that have been agreed give clear guidance, for example, to the DVM on dealing with contiguous culls and on how the guidance should be applied.

Indeed, there is an argument for taking local conditions into account and for more flexibility. Those are some of the issues that people have put to us and we are not unsympathetic to them.I believe that we have responded in the Bill and, in particular, in putting in place the protocols, which are also published. People can see the sort of guidelines and procedures that our DVMs and vets have to follow.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): In view of what my hon. Friend the Minister has just said about the protocols that are now in place and the lessons that the

Government are learning, is he convinced that the Government now have the balance right? The introduction of SI 843, Animal Health, England, which applied to BSE, caused some alarm because of provisions on forced entry—indeed, my constituent Mrs. Jones shared that concern. Does he think that there are now safeguards and that people need not be concerned about that power of entry in view of the raft of measures that we are introducing?

Mr. Morley: Absolutely. My hon. Friend is referring to the statutory instrument dealing with the TSE regulations, which we debated in Committee and which was carried with no opposition. I made it clear to the Committee that there had been an enormous amount of disinformation as regards that regulation, which has somehow got tied up with the measures in the Bill. The TSE regulations deal with BSE and TSE. There are no entry powers within that regulation. It deals with BSE and cohort cases—if a cow goes down with BSE, the cohort is slaughtered to safeguard public health.

One of the more incredible allegations was that the TSE order had been sneaked in by the back door, despite the fact that we consulted nearly 1,000 organisations about it, none of which expressed any concern. That shows that even well-meaning people can sometimes get carried away with the wrong interpretation of the Government's actions and intentions. I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend and that she can reassure her constituent. I have answered one or two letters on the matter, and have made it clear that people have been misled. I am sure that that is true in the case of my hon. Friend's constituent.

Mr. Bacon: Will the Minister confirm that the amendment requiring warrants to be executed only at a reasonable hour unless the inspector thinks that the case is urgent is the result of an amendment tabled by the Government? If so, does the Minister accept that no one would expect such a condition to apply to a warrant for a drugs bust, when one would not want to give advance notice to drug dealers? His earlier argument that the amendment fundamentally undermines the nature of warrant issue is therefore flawed.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman's example is very different from the warrants under discussion. We are not dealing with criminals. We are trying to deal reasonably with people. The amendment was a Government amendment, tabled in the light of representations that we received in Committee and in the other place. It is a genuine attempt to allay people's concerns. We understand that if we are taking powers to go on to someone's property in order to carry out disease control measures, whatever they are—not necessarily culling—people need to be reassured that they would be used only if it were absolutely necessary, and that they would be applied in a proportionate and reasonable way. That is what we are trying to do.

Mr. Bacon: Of course I realise that we are not dealing with criminals; that was precisely my point. The Minister, if I understood him correctly, was arguing that we could not accept the amendment because it would set a precedent and would have far-reaching implications for the issue of warrants. I was arguing that it was surely possible to distinguish between different kinds of warrants issued for different reasons, so there is no reason not to accept the amendment.

Mr. Morley: I repeat that I am not a legal expert, but from my knowledge of warrants I know that they are issued in different ways for different circumstances. What is proposed in this case is a fundamental difference—an unprecedented change in the way in which warrants are issued. It suggests that the farmer and DEFRA officials can stand in front of a magistrate and almost have a mini court scene. If there is to be such a facility, people must be given reasonable time to prepare, to make applications for legal aid, and all the various aspects of representation, which is unprecedented—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Morley: That can be done by a High Court judge, but it is a completely separate matter from the issue of a warrant by a magistrate. The hon. Gentleman, who is familiar with legal procedures, knows that to be true. If the positions were reversed, I do not believe that he would want to change fundamentally the precedents and the entire procedure for the issue of magistrates warrants. That is why we must reverse the amendments.

There are amendments with which we do not disagree. Amendments Nos. 15,25, 38 and 68 expressly permit an inspector to take on to premises equipment that he or she requires. It may be presumed that an inspector will carry relevant equipment, but there is in theory the potential for disputes over whether an inspector may take equipment on to premises. The amendments are required to avoid any doubt.

We support amendments Nos. 16, 18, 26, 28, 39, 41, 69 and 71. They deal with the requirement to give assistance to officials carrying out functions under the vaccination, slaughter and serology entry provisions, and with the issue of those from whom assistance can be requested. They again reflect concerns expressed by hon. Members. We do not want to make demands in respect of assisting officials that would be unreasonable or go beyond what an individual could be expected to provide. An inspector could not, therefore, make unreasonable demands on people who were not qualified to help, such as children or elderly people.

9 pm

We are, however, sympathetic to the suggestion that, for the sake of clarity, the powers should be limited to the occupier of the premises, the keeper of the animals or persons under the control of people in those two categories. In Committee, concerns were expressed about visiting friends or relatives, or people who merely happen to be on the premises and might be dragooned into providing assistance.

We do not have that intention. We are prepared to amend the Bill to make that very clear and to remove the perceived risk of any bystanders or even children being requested or required to assist. Such an amendment also responds to the recommendation of the Joint Committee on Human Rights that, for the sake of

[Mr. Morley]

clarity, the powers should be explicitly limited to the protection afforded by convention rights and in keeping with it.

Lords amendments Nos. 17, 27, 40 and 70 deal with the requirement to give assistance to officials carrying out functions under the vaccination, slaughter and serology provisions. They are also designed to allay concerns that the requests for reasonable assistance would not involve unreasonable legal demands on people who are not qualified to help.

The purpose of Lords amendments Nos. 19, 29, 42 and 72 is to ensure that, in the event of a warrant being granted, an inspector will serve a copy on the owner of the premises or, in their absence, leave a copy in a conspicuous place. That ensures that people are aware that the warrant has been issued. Given the weight of argument about the warrant conditions, we tabled the amendments to introduce more safeguards to ensure that the powers are subject to a rigorous and transparent test of reasonableness and that the overall balance of public interest takes proper account of the private interests and rights of the farmer.

That last comment sums up the Government's approach to dealing with warrants and access. We firmly believe that the disease control measures are necessary. Let me emphasise again that we are not talking only about culling, but about vaccination and serology. The need for speed and very clear measures was recognised in the independent reports, and we are responding to that in the Bill. We are trying to reassure people that the powers would be applied only in a reasonable and proportionate way.

I think that the House will agree that we have moved a long way in the amendments to reflect people's concerns. While we are trying to be as reasonable as we can to ensure the appropriate checks and balances and to be open and transparent, we cannot concede on setting down unprecedented legal changes in relation to the issuing of warrants by magistrates, although we have conceded a number of significant changes to reflect hon. Members' concerns.

Mr. Hayes: The Minister is right to say that the Government have accepted a number of the suggestions made in the other place. They have done so in line with the suggestions made by the Joint Committee on Human Rights. It might be useful for the House to hear what the Committee said:

"legislation which confers apparently wide powers or imposes apparently wide liabilities should make clear the limitations which are imposed by Convention rights. This is desirable in the interests of legal certainty and the notion of the rule of law, ideas which are central to effective guarantees of human rights."

The Minister has acknowledged that some of the proposals that were made in the Lords amendments were necessary to comply with those demands. Having said that, there is still disagreement between the two Houses over the balance between the rights of the individual, to which the Minister rightly paid attention, and the need to effect the speedy delivery of measures to deal with a crisis such as the one from which we suffered recently.

I will return in a moment to the point made by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) about the presentation of information to a justice of the peace. Before I do so, I emphasise that, when examining this group of amendments, we must bear it in mind that we are dealing with animals likely to be slaughtered as part of a ring-fenced cull—not with animals already infected in their own right—in circumstances in which a firebreak policy has been adopted around an infected area to protect the health of the wider national animal stock. As Lord Greaves pointed out in the other place, the issues involved in these amendments are pertinent to that point.

The Minister and the whole House will be aware that the tactics relating to such culling caused immense controversy during the foot and mouth epidemic. Much of the bitterness that ensued is still felt in many rural communities, and many hon. Members will have farmers in their constituencies who still feel the effects very deeply. Given that, and given that the strategy for dealing with these outbreaks should be based on a partnership approach and on collaboration between the industry and the Government, the issue of warrants seems to be a particularly sensitive one. After all, we are talking about going on to someone's property and slaughtering healthy animals, albeit—arguably—for the necessary purpose of preventing the spread of disease.

The National Farmers Union has commented on this issue. I do not want to become the lackey of the NFU, but it is important that we consider what it has to say. It states that it regrets

"that the Government has decided to overturn the amendments . . . which provide for farmers to be informed of the reasons for the authorities applying for a warrant to a JP and to have an opportunity to make representations to a JP including the presentation of sworn information."

That point was raised by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome when he questioned the Minister on the ability of a farmer to make such a representation directly to a justice of the peace. It is a matter of grave concern that a JP could issue a warrant on the basis of information from the Ministry that could not be challenged. If I were the Minister, I would want checks and balances here, because we are all fallible. Those checks and balances are important in regard to the hearing of the cases of people directly affected by the events that I am describing. The amendment would afford protection for individual farmers; but—more subtly, perhaps—it would give some protection to Ministers from their own powers.

Mr. Heath: If a farmer had made representations to the district veterinary manager before a warrant was applied for, there would be a duty on the DVM to share that relevant information with a magistrate—not, as the Minister said, as a result of a request from the magistrate, but as part of his duty to the court. It would be a matter of disclosure.

Mr. Hayes: In respect of the information being provided, that is the nub of the issue. The difference between us and the Government is that we believe that the farmer affected should have a right to present that information in sworn form to a magistrate. The Minister, however, while trying to be helpful, was suggesting that that would probably take place—that local circumstances would probably mean that the magistrate was aware of the information—without

guaranteeing a firm and comprehensive right for a farmer to make that information available. Perhaps the Minister will deal with that matter later.

Mrs. Browning: There is another aspect. Farmers remain on-farm in the throes of a foot and mouth outbreak, so their ability to make personal representations is limited. They need a third party—either a lawyer or an NFU representative—so the right for information to be put before a magistrate is important, as it would be very unusual for farmers to come off-farm to deliver it in person.

Mr. Hayes: That is right. Farmers, in addition to being physically isolated, would be intimidated, bewildered and frightened by such circumstances. Frankly, people who are running a business that is under threat, especially those who live on site, as farmers frequently do, might not be in a position to argue their case as comprehensively or persuasively as they otherwise might. All those considerations reinforce the spirit of partnership that I have recommended in the debate as the prerequisite to an effective national strategy.

That is the core of the issue, which was addressed in the other place by a number of Members, not least my noble Friend Baroness Byford.

Mr. Morley: Before the hon. Gentleman refers to his quote, may I deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), which, again, is not unreasonable? Sometimes, it is important that people who are worried or under stress or who perhaps feel that they are too shy to make representations have someone to speak on their behalf, but there is no reason why NFU officials, or even a solicitor, could not make a case to the DVM on behalf of a particular farmer. There is nothing to prevent them from doing that, nor would we want to prevent them from doing it. Indeed, we want to encourage the NFU and other farming organisations to have the information to make such cases on behalf of their members if they so choose.

Mr. Hayes: Once again, the Minister is helpful and co-operative, but he has not gone as far as the Lords would ask him to travel. In that respect, the Lords probably have it right and it may be useful to hear some of what they said. In particular, I shall quote the Minister's noble Friend Baroness Mallalieu, who speaks not only with legal training and expertise, but with a keen interest in and knowledge of countryside matters. Before I do so, I want to refer to the remarks of my noble Friend Baroness Byford.

It is perhaps worth adding that my noble Friend has played an essential role in improving the Bill. The Minister, with his usual grace, will want to acknowledge that a bad Bill has been made better by the work done in the Lords, particularly by Conservative and, though it pains me to say it, Liberal Democrat Members of that House. In the words of Baroness Byford, they have made a bad Bill a better bad Bill. In a number of respects, she played a crucial role in that process. She said that it is surely reasonable that the magistrate should be satisfied that, in the first place, no one is challenging the interpretation that has been put to him by the Ministry, adding:

"How can he balance the inspector's view against that of the owner of the premises that the inspector requires access if he has not heard the other side?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 November 2002; Vol. 640, c. 499-500.]

That is a fair point, which was reinforced by a number of speakers in the Lords, not least Baroness Mallalieu. I hope that I may beg the House's indulgence and quote her at length, as she summed up the whole matter:

"One of the lasting legacies of the foot and mouth outbreak, which has led to continuing resentment, was the sense of powerlessness in the face of the authorities on the part of those faced with people attempting to get into their premises to slaughter their stock.

I accept that a balance has to be struck between the need to control disease urgently and the rights of the owners of animals—the landowners and farmers. I appreciate that the paramount consideration in the Minister's mind—stung as he and his colleagues were by criticisms of their department—is that they should have the powers to act as swiftly as possible."

We are not talking about diseased animals, however. We are talking about healthy animals that would be part of a ring-fence, firebreak approach to try to stop the spread of disease.

9.15 pm

Lady Mallalieu said that once the application had been made, the farmer should be given a chance to be heard. She summarised her argument thus:

"But surely, if you are going to destroy someone's healthy stock, which is the proposal here, you must give that person the opportunity to be heard at an early stage of the warrant." —[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 1304.]

We have heard from the Minister that there is the option of judicial review, and that of course exists; but, as a number of their lordships pointed out, the stock would be dead. The satisfaction of knowing that the due legal process had been followed would be of little use to those wanting to salvage their livelihoods or to deal with the immediate problem of someone going on to their land. I feel that immediacy is important in terms of access to a fair hearing and the due process of law.

I mentioned the United States national animal health emergency system, the US equivalent of our emerging national contingency plan. As I said, it is based on the collaborative approach that I believe is essential if we are to achieve the objectives that are shared by the two Houses and the two sides of this Chamber. The action guidelines at the heart of the US plan include strengthening partnerships and networks, reinforcing federal, state and industry co-ordination, expanding training, education and public awareness and a strong emphasis on co-operation between industry and every level of government. That is why the issue of warrants is so salient. They are not just important in themselves; they are important because they symbolise an attitude and a balance.

The real differences exist between a Government who, understandably, want legislation that delivers immediacy, effectiveness and a degree of predictability and control and an Opposition who, I suspect, want more flexibility. Flexibility is important. If we have learned anything from the dreadful business of 2001, we have learned that the disease strikes unexpectedly, progresses in a way that is hard to predict, changes its form and is dynamic; and that a new outbreak of this

[Mr. Hayes]

disease—or another disease entirely—would be just as unpredictable. Of course the contingency plan must take account of some factors of which we can be reasonably certain, but it must be flexible enough to allow Ministers, officials and all the proper agencies to react in a way that is appropriate to local conditions and circumstances that are particular to a disease at a certain point.

Another difference between us relates to the balance between the rights and responsibilities of farmers and owners and the power of Government to deal with the disease. There must, of course, be a balance between those two imperatives, but the Opposition believe that rights are of paramount importance in the context of reassuring the industry about the need to adopt many of the necessary measures that are in the Bill and will be included in the national plan. Unless we have the necessary confidence and raise the morale of the industry, we will not have an easy passage in adopting and implementing some of the necessary changes on which I think we mostly agree.

Those are the two salient differences between what was said in the other place and what the Minister is now saying and between what the Opposition believe and what the Government advocate. Warrants are at the very heart of that difference. For those reasons, it will be necessary for Opposition Members to oppose the Government's position and support that adopted by the other place.

Andrew George: I agree with the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) that it is regrettable that the Government have taken this view. I shall concentrate on the Government amendments that seek to delete those essential lines from the warrant amendments. Since the hon. Gentleman referred to co-operation between constructive Opposition parties, it is worth noting that the amendments were tabled by my noble Friends in another place. They provide for farmers to be informed of the reasons for the authorities applying to a magistrate for a warrant to enter premises and to have the opportunity to make representations to that magistrate, including the presentation of sworn information. The provisions are relatively straightforward.

Part of the Minister's attempted justification for deleting those essential lines was, predictably, that the provision would produce unwanted delays in a process that requires speed. I shall return to that in a moment. His other main argument against it was that these measures, if they were allowed to remain in the Bill, would be unprecedented in the warrant-making process. The Minister needs to understand that this is not just about entry to premises; it is also about the destruction of the content of those premises.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) made some rather telling legal points. I do not have a legal mind, but it is clear to me that not all new law has a precedent. Many new initiatives would never happen if we said that we could not do something because it had never been done before. One example is the Government handing over to the Bank of England the power to set interest rates. They did not refrain from doing that because it was unprecedented. The argument that anything that is unprecedented must not be done is fallacious and does not stand up to scrutiny.

The Minister was aware of the amendment and had the opportunity to look at it in one of two ways. If he were genuinely concerned about the delay rather than the macho concern about the Bill being changed too much, he could have taken the view that it should be amended by the addition of further lines to clarify the time limits within which representations should be made, for example, rather than attempting to delete the essential provisions that give farmers a justifiable right to make representations in order to ensure that the magistrate hears both sides of the argument. Fundamentally it is all about ensuring that the magistrate, having been presented with the arguments, understands all the factors that pertain in the case of a particular holding. We believe that the principle is very important, and that the amendment should have been accepted.

The Minister made the predictable point that the provision would result in delay, but much of the evidence shows that, had it been available at the time of the outbreak, the process might have been speeded up. Opposition to entry for initial testing is far less likely, and even less so if vaccination to live were the Government's preferred policy. Farmers would certainly be reassured. Delays in dealing with the crisis last year had far less to do with farm owners appealing against decisions, and more to do with operational incompetence.

Evidence presented by the National Audit Office in its June 2002 report makes no reference to farmers holding up the system. The report states:

"The three main factors contributing to delays in slaughter were: shortages of resources: vets, valuemen, slaughtermen and equipment ... Inspection and diagnosis protocols: Occasional delays may have occurred when laboratory results for the initial antigen test were inconclusive. There was also initially a requirement that during a report visit the Department's vet should check all livestock before carrying out a detailed clinical examination of the affected animal(s). In addition, at the beginning of the outbreak, vets were not permitted to undertake another visit within five days of visiting an infected premises. This constraint was addressed on 10 March 2001."

There were also logistical factors:

"the time needed to round up large flocks of sheep and inefficient early arrangements to ensure the co-ordinated arrival of valuers, slaughtermen and disposal teams."

Those were the factors—not farmers making clear objections to entry on to their farms.

Farmers were prepared to work with the Government, rather than refuse permission to enter their farms. The report continues:

"Some farmers challenged the contiguous cull: This took the form, on occasions, of refusing access to premises, which sometimes forced the Department to take out a High Court injunction. More commonly, farmers formally requested the Department to reconsider its decision to cull while there were also some challenges in court."

The Minister does not properly understand the point that was well made by the hon. Member for South Holland and the Deepings: one lesson that we must

learn from the last outbreak is the need properly to re-establish trust between the Government and the industry. Page 37 of the Anderson report states:

"Contingency planning is not just producing a written document. Rather, it is about putting in place the systems, processes and culture to respond effectively to crises. Above all, it about a shared sense of ownership and purpose across the relevant stakeholder community."

It is important that that principle be carried through by ensuring that, in cases where a warrant is secured, farmers have a right to respond.

Fundamentally, given that the Minister agreed in Committee that entry to premises to slaughter animals was different from other situations where the power to enter was sought and that, ideally, farmers should have the kind of rights contained in the amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, I urge him to reconsider his position and accept that the change that we propose, even if unprecedented, is an acceptable and progressive measure, which the House should support.

9.30 pm

Mr. Bacon: I particularly agreed with the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) about one of the first points he made—the suggestion that nothing should be done because doing something would create a precedent. Of course it is true that everything is unprecedented until it is done for the first time. That seemed a curious argument to come from a new Labour Minister. The hon. Gentleman speculated that I did not want to effect such a fundamental change, but I have news for him: I came into the House precisely to effect fundamental change, and one day Conservative Members will have the opportunity to do precisely that. I shall remind him that I said that; I am very assiduous in keeping quotes, as he knows.

To understand this business about warrants and entry, it is important to go back to the fundamental basis of the Bill. I was rudely interrupted by the rules of the House on this point when I was the last hon. Member to speak on Third Reading and had to confine my remarks to the remaining one minute and 45 seconds. We have to reflect on the fact that the Government introduced the Bill because, during the foot and mouth crisis, they killed millions of healthy animals that they had no legal right to kill and no scientific basis for killing.

Paragraph 3(1) of schedule 3 to the Animal Health Act 1981—the relevant provision that refers to the Minister's powers to kill animals—states:

"The Minister may, if he thinks fits, in any case cause to be slaughtered . . . any animals affected with foot-and-mouth disease, or suspected of being so affected; and . . . any animals which are or have been in the same field, shed, or other place, or in the same herd or flock, or other in contact with animals affected with foot-and-mouth disease, or which appear to the Minister to have been in any way exposed to the infection of foot-and-mouth disease."

In other words, the Minister had to have some grounds for thinking that the animals were infected before he could kill them. He had no basis in statute law for exercising the slaughter. We have to ask, therefore, whether any basis had developed in case law to undertake the cull. The answer is that, no, there was not.

I commend to the House an excellent speech made by Lord—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The question that the hon. Gentleman should ask himself is about the warrant conditions. His remarks so far indicate that he is going wider than the ambit of Lords Amendment No. 14.

Mr. Bacon: I respect what you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but if you will bear with me very briefly, I hope to show that these matters are intimately related because they go back to the non-existent trust between farmers and the Government. That lack of trust causes the power of entry that the Minister seeks to cause so much suspicion among farmers.

The fact is that there was no statutory basis for the cull; neither was there a basis in case law. Lord Willoughby de Broke referred to three relevant cases. The Government won the first two—that of Westerhall Farms *v.* Scottish Ministers and MAFF *v.* Winslade—but, crucially, not all the required scientific information was available to the courts. However, the Government lost the first case based on correct science—MAFF *v.* Upton—in which all the scientific information available to the Department was available to the court.

In his speech, Lord Willoughby de Broke said that, if the Minister was looking for a bedrock case for or against the continuous cull, he could find it in the Upton case. In that case, Dr. Donaldson's scientific evidence was produced by the defending solicitors and won the day for the defendants.

Mr. Hayes: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bacon: Of course.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I imagine that he is making the case—and he is doing it very well—that there is an intimate relationship between the lack of trust that farmers feel for the action taken by the Government in culling healthy animals and the Government's proposals for warrants and entry conditions. My hon. Friend suggests that farmers will mistrust the warrants in the form that the Government propose. The Lords tried to amend the warrants, but the Government clearly do not want to accept those amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) has provided an escape route, and I hope that the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) will take it. He has to be concise when he puts his argument, or he will be ignoring the ruling that I gave earlier.

Mr. Bacon: I am utterly serious when I say that I am not looking for an escape route, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) has precisely enunciated the argument that I wanted to make. The Government forfeited farmers' trust because MAFF officials went to farms and slaughtered healthy animals even though their actions had no basis in statute, case law or science.

[Mr. Bacon]

Various hon. Members have noted the importance of farmers being represented in a warrant hearing, and one might be able to give the Minister's case more credence were it not for the experience of what happened. Farmers generally have no trust in the Minister's proposals because of the way in the which the Government acted during the crisis. That was precisely the point that I was in the process of making. In his speech, Lord Willoughby de Broke asked why the Ministry never fought a case for an injunction to enable a contiguous cull to proceed after the decision in the Upton case was given. The reason was that the Ministry knew that it had been proceeding on a wholly inadequate basis.

That is the context for our consideration of the proposal that there should be no right in advance of slaughter for a farmer to go before a justice of the peace and contest a warrant.

Mr. Wiggin: Earlier, the Minister commented on the number of cases that the DVM upheld. That gave me cause for concern, as farmers are worried about whether warrants will arrive before or after animals are culled. I hope that the Minister, when he closes the debate, will say whether the cases to which he did not draw attention were also relevant. Does my hon. Friend think that farmers' human rights may be infringed by the proposal? Farmers who go to court must have a reason for doing so, and it is not fair to proceed without them.

Mr. Bacon: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Government have had the grace to admit that they cannot abolish judicial review for administrative action, but their proposals seem to mean that big-ticket farmers with deep wallets and access to big lawyers can go straight to the High Court to secure an injunction. The Minister will be able to do nothing about that, as people have a legal right to obtain injunctions. Hundreds of people got satisfaction from the DVM, but that does not alter the fact that MAFF, as the Department then was, exceeded its powers and acted in excess of what a court would have considered reasonable. They may have been a minority, but many people were involved in such cases, which have been the subject of much comment and which have caused a great deal of mistrust.

Our courts are too full already, and we do not want them to become any more clogged up, but farmers should not have to have deep wallets so that they can take out a High Court injunction. Farmers should be able, in a simple and short procedure, to go before the magistrate when the warrant is being applied for and make their case. As I said to the Minister earlier, one could believe this to be a heinous alteration to the way in which warrants were issued if one were talking about big criminals. We would not want to give drugs dealers the right to contest a warrant—*[Interruption]*—well, the law could be changed. We do not want to give big drugs dealers the right to contest the warrant before a judge. If they knew that there was about to be a drugs bust, they would be long gone. As the Minister said, we are not talking about big criminals.

Mr. Wiggin: One of the problems throughout the debate is that it seems as though the Government are always blaming the farmers for the entire foot and mouth crisis. My hon. Friend's point emphasises once again that it is difficult, when discussing this, to distinguish between proper criminals who deal in drugs and people who are desperately trying to eke out a living farming livestock without having their stock slaughtered.

Mr. Bacon: Whether they meant it or not—and I am willing to accept that that at the highest levels of MAFF they did not mean it—the Government's actions made many law-abiding people feel criminal, when they were struggling to keep themselves afloat and seeing their farm income dropping through the floor.

In conclusion, the Government's basis for the slaughter was illegal and scientifically flawed. The basis of the Bill is to repair that deficit but in the context of the lack of trust created by the Government through their own actions, it is entirely reasonable to expect a farmer to be able to contest a warrant.

Mr. Morley: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to say a few words about some of the points that have been made.

I recognise that this is an important aspect of the Bill. I repeat that the Government are trying to be reasonable and proportionate. We want to reassure people and ensure that these measures are used only when necessary. We want to ensure that there is a right of representation to the DVM and that farmers are aware of that right. Indeed, we have no objection to people making representations on their behalf. We have accepted other changes, such as retaining warrants for 12 months. Hon. Members have referred to the dating on the warrants and how they would be applied. That is in reflection of legitimate cases.

I am very aware of the United States system to which the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) referred. Indeed, aspects of that system are being built into some of our responsibilities. The hon. Gentleman and I seem to be talking different languages, but I agree with him about the need for maximum flexibility. The whole point of the Bill is to give our veterinary scientists and divisional managers maximum flexibility in dealing with any future outbreak.

Let me say to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George)—and I stress again that I am not a legal expert—that I have a distinct feeling that it would be difficult to set time limits for representations if there was a right for individuals to make representations against the issuing of a warrant. I am pretty sure that if the time scale is too short it will be challenged by lawyers who will say that they do not have enough time to make their case. That is inevitable. If the time available is too long, people will simply utilise the maximum time leading to delays and restricting flexibility.

There was a range of reasons for delays during the last epidemic, which we understand. We are trying to address that and we are willing, as I have always been, to consider a range of options in this case. However, I am convinced, because of the advice that I have received

from the highest level, that this proposal would set a precedent that we cannot concede in relation to the changes in the issuing of warrants.

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Mr. Morley: I cannot give way, I am afraid, because I am about to conclude.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) seems to have an obsession with claims and conspiracy theories about healthy animals being culled. Many of the animals that were culled were developing the disease. There may well be a case for fire break culls in the future, although it is not my preferred option—I would much rather use vaccination. However, there must be flexibility. We recognise the points about people's trust and concerns. That is why we have made these changes to the Bill, which I hope that right hon. and hon. Members recognise. I hope that they also recognise that although we understand the reasons for the Lords amendments, they go too far in setting an unwelcome precedent that we cannot ignore and cannot accept.

It being five hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR SPEAKER, *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings to be concluded at that hour* pursuant to Order [this day].

Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 14 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 14, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 7

SLAUGHTER: POWER OF ENTRY

Lords amendment: No. 22, in Page 4, line 33, leave out from beginning to end of line 1 on page 5 and insert—

"(3) The second condition is that each of the following applies to the occupier of the premises —

(a) he has been informed of the decision to seek entry to the premises and of the reasons for that decision;

(b) he has failed to allow entry to the premises on being requested to do so by an inspector;

(c) he has been informed of the decision to apply for the warrant and of the reasons for that decision including a copy of the sworn information;

(d) he has been provided with an opportunity to make representations to the justice of the peace about whether the warrant should be issued;

(e) he has been provided with the opportunity to present sworn information in person or in writing to the justice of the peace who is to consider the application for a warrant."

(4) The third condition is that—

(a) the premises are unoccupied or the occupier is absent and (in either case) notice of intention to apply for the warrant has been left in a conspicuous place on the premises, or

(b) an application for admission to the premises or the giving of notice of intention to apply for the warrant would defeat the object of entering the premises."

Amendment proposed to the Lords amendment: (a)—[*Mr. Morley*], *Question put,* That *the amendment be made:—*

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 172.

Division No. 358] **[9:46 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam

Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes: Jim Fitzpatrick and Gillian Merron

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Mrs Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael

Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Chris Grayling and
Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 35 and Govt amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 15 to 21, 23 to 34 and 36 to 44 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 46.

Mr. Morley: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The Government agree that we must take action to minimise the risk of importing animal diseases that have the potential to do serious damage. That is why we are taking action to tackle the problem of illegal imports of meat and meat products, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spelt out in some detail the kind of measures that we are taking. The illegal imports action plan covers a wide range of measures. It is expected that future action to combat illegal imports will be informed by the outcome of the assessment of disease risk and a review of how import controls can be better arranged.

In the course of the debate, we have recognised that in relation to reducing disease risk we need to take action on a number of fronts, which we have been discussing in detail, and we recognise that points of entry is one of them. That is why we take the matter seriously and are introducing these measures. In that respect, we agree with the Lords amendment.

Mr. Hayes: I shall speak briefly on this matter, as we wish to move on to others.

The Government have generously and wisely conceded to the demands of the House of Lords in this respect. That is important, as illegal meat imports are a massive problem in this country, which is widely acknowledged in the House and was mentioned earlier when we debated the response to the Anderson inquiry. Indeed, according to the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee report published in March 2002, the trade in unfit and illegal meat is the third most lucrative illegal enterprise in this country, netting more than £1 billion worth of trade per year. The primary reason for that is lack of implementation and the wrangling that takes place between a variety of agencies. We were pleased to hear earlier that that will be dealt with by drawing all of these matters under the auspices of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

In conclusion, import controls must be an integral part of any disease control strategy. At the moment, it appears to many farmers that the 20-day rule adversely affects their ability to do their business properly and fruitfully. While they are being strangled, however, airports and other points of entry do not have effective checks in place. It is therefore vitally important that we turn our attention to meat imports in a meaningful, properly resourced way.

Mr. Wiggin: We are debating animal health, but I am sure my hon. Friend agrees that we could expose ourselves to diseases such as Ebola if the promises on Customs and Excise are not fulfilled.

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend, with his usual perspicacity, makes the point effectively. It is important to realise that it is not simply a case of illegality; there is also the great danger of a public health risk. The Minister and the Secretary of State have acknowledged that. The relevant authorities are going to be brought together to address the problem. We hope that that will be properly resourced and proper information will be provided. We also hope that the conversion engenders public confidence and the confidence of the industry because such matters need to be taken more seriously, as the Lords made clear.

Andrew George: I, too, congratulate the Government on accepting the amendment tabled by my noble Friend Lord Livsey. They have been receptive to strong arguments. Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned: had the Government pushed the Bill through at the speed they intended, such an important amendment might not have been made. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) on his ten-minute Bill of a few months ago which would have established the same measure. I congratulate the Government on listening to the arguments and considering the seriousness of the problem. For the reasons set out by hon. Members and in the expansive debate in another place, it is essential that more stringent controlled surveillance and monitoring is put in place.

I have just one point to add Although I welcome the announcement by the Secretary of State that the measures will come under the overall control of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, the fact is that the most recent surveys by independent bodies, such as the National Farmers Union survey this summer, show that there is tremendous leakage through airports and ports. It is an extremely serious matter. I hope that the Minister's Department will not wash its hands of the problem and leave it to the Treasury and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to sort out. The Department needs to be directly engaged to ensure that proper controls are

[Andrew George]

followed through and that every effort is made to stop the illegal trade, which represents a significant bio-security risk.

Mr. Drew: Lest there be no misunderstanding, my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) and I tabled the original amendment on imports. I am glad that my hon. Friend has seen the wisdom of agreeing to the measure, albeit a year later. The subject is important. Since the amendment appeared in its original incarnation, the Select Committee report has been published highlighting the need for action.

I have a simple point to make. On bearing down on illegal meat imports and other imports that could damage our food chain, we must remember that it is not the person who brings in such products on a casual basis that causes most concern. Those people who are into the serious trade should worry us most. They might not even use the main points of entry. We need to ensure that policies are in place to deal with them.

I am pleased that the provision has been accepted. I know that discussions took place behind the scenes. I am glad that my hon. Friend has seen fit to do the decent thing and make it clear that the Government are going to deal with such issues. We need to tackle the hard edge of the problem. Those people on the soft edge act more in error than anything else. We can do more at the ports, but we need to get hold of the people who are importing such products as part of a serious and growing trade because they threaten our food trade now and in the future.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) will recall that my colleagues and I voted for the hon. Gentleman's amendment in Committee, by which time he had withdrawn it, or voted against it. Indeed, the Minister dismissed all attempts in Committee at amendments to improve and strengthen import controls. In fact, I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman accepted any amendments to the Bill in this place.

I remind Ministers that my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) pointed out to them in recent weeks some of the plans and preparations that have been put in place by some of our European partners since the outbreak of foot and mouth in the United Kingdom last year. I am a little disappointed, therefore, despite the welcome announcement by the Secretary of State today of the ban on personal meat imports and the hon. Gentleman's promise to review annually the way in which controls are being put into place. This is not rocket science—I suspect that much of it has to do with the political will to get the resources from the Treasury to put in place effective import controls.

If the Minister travels to Dublin, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury and I did during the summer recess, he will find that Dublin airport has put in place amnesty bins since the outbreak, and the Irish had only one case of foot and mouth at the same time as us. I tabled a written question to the Minister on amnesty bins only last week. Today, I received the reply that he and his hon. Friends are "consulting". An amnesty bin is not rocket science and it does not need masses of consultation. If the Irish Government have managed to put them in place, why have we not managed to do it?

Mr. Morley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: I will finish my questions, as the Minister may wish to deal with them together.

When one gets off the plane in Dublin, one is immediately struck by the bold notices—not some little thing around the carousel—that invite people who have recently been on a farm to go to a centre where they can decontaminate their shoes and so forth. The Irish Government have set up their own office in Dublin airport since foot and mouth last year, so that they have veterinary officials on site to deal with any problems.

The tardiness of our Government, when other countries have clearly had the will to put measures in place, does not commend the measures that the Minister has announced, on which he says that he will report annually. He should get those measures in place. That is the priority. We will look forward to the annual reports, but this Government have a track record of producing reports on just about everything, full of spin, and it is the substance that we want—it is the beef. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman now, if he still wishes to intervene.

Mr. Morley *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Browning: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is going to pass on that offer.

The Government have an important part to play. They have chided the farming community and legislated to ensure that it plays its part. We now want to see some substance, not just reports.

Adam Price: I, too, congratulate the Government on accepting the amendment. As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said, the issue is vitally important. At the very least, the report will maintain a focus on the issue.

The Government have shown some complacency and laxity on the subject of illegal meat imports, which contrasts with their initiatives on controls on domestic farmers. We welcome the action plan, but a few posters and two trained sniffer dogs at Heathrow airport will not be enough to get to grips with this vitally important problem. Let us contrast that with the actions of the Irish Government and with other Governments throughout the world, for example, Canada, Australia and the United States, where the issue has been on the agenda for many decades.

We know to our cost the consequences of complacency on this issue.

10.15 pm

In evidence presented to the European Parliament inquiry on foot and mouth, Clive Lawrence, the chief executive of the Heathrow-based freight company Ciel Logistics, said that he notified the Government in a letter to the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of the dangers posed by illegal meat imports to animal and human health, including the risk of foot and mouth. The letter was dated 10 May 2000, more than six

months before the foot and mouth outbreak. We cannot afford such complacency from this Government or any other again. Clearly, there are issues of resources and lessons that can be drawn right across the world. At least the report will allow us, we hope, to assess the effectiveness of the measures that the Government have put in place already, and to develop a new policy dynamic whereby we can address the issues.

As has been said, meat smuggling is an extremely lucrative trade, with almost zero risk, compared with other forms of smuggling, and with a very high return. Some of the measures suggested, such as on-the-spot fines, will not get to grips with highly organised criminal gangs. Of course, couriers often have no money. We need the report, which it will allow us to probe the effectiveness of the Government's plans. The UK remains heavily exposed to imports from regions where animal diseases, including foot and mouth, are endemic. I hope that the Government's acceptance of the amendment is a signal that, for the first time, they intend to take the matter of illegal meat imports seriously, so that we can have some confidence about food security and the future of farming in this country.

Mr. Bacon: I welcome the fact that the Government have accepted the amendment, but I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said, the preparation of an annual report is not the whole story, and that just as we were right last year about the need for a report, we are also correct about the need for tougher action.

I spent several hours yesterday with Customs and Excise at Dover. I wish that the Minister would go there and see for himself, spend a little time at the nation's airports, and understand that we are not making these arguments trivially or lightly. We all welcome the steps that have been taken and the publicity campaign, but more needs to be done.

I shall make one other point, concerning the nature of open government. The Government's decision to accept the amendment and allow a report to Parliament once a year is indicative of a wider spread of information, which we must welcome. The Drummond report was not published, but was available to the Ministry in January 1999, and set out in brutal detail the Government's unpreparedness. A presentation to the state veterinary service national management meeting on 5 December 2000, dealing with the control of pigs, stated:

"Never look on the bright side in a notifiable disease emergency! Always assume that the worst will happen and then you are pleasantly surprised if it doesn't."

If those warnings had been available not just to departmental civil servants, but publicly, it is difficult to believe that the Government would not have been better prepared when foot and mouth hit in February last year. More information is essential.

Mr. Morley: I welcome the fact that most hon. Members who have spoken recognise that the Government have accepted the amendment, which follows on from a commitment that I gave in Committee, after representations from my hon. Friends the Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ), that the matter was certainly worth further consideration , and that we would return to it. That commitment has been honoured.

I understand the points made by the hon. Members for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), and for St. Ives (Andrew George), my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud, and the hon. Members for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon). I can tell the hon. Member for South Norfolk that I spend a great deal of time hanging around airports, sometimes longer than I would like, and of course I look at what we are doing in this country and what is being done in other countries.

Hon. Members should understand that there are issues of risk assessment involved. We could spend a large amount of resources and study what other countries are doing, but sometimes it is more a matter of image and perception—I do not underestimate the importance of the message that we give people—than of being effective. Resources can sometimes be allocated in ways that do not achieve maximum effectiveness, which is why we have commissioned an independent study by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency to identify the biggest risks. It may well be that the biggest risks are in large-scale illegal meat smuggling. We have seized shipments and imprisoned people involved in meat smuggling. I think that that is the first time that people have been imprisoned for such an offence. We take firm action in enforcing the law.

Furthermore, a lot of the work that we are doing and which the Secretary of State mentioned is not properly seen by people in our country. We assess where risk is located. For example, when people in high-risk countries apply for visas to visit our country, they receive a leaflet explaining the risks and the UK measures and regulations by which they must abide. That has been backed up by videos provided by air companies with our co-operation, as well as information leaflets and posters and a range of work, and not least the increased powers for enforcement and inspection and the streamlining of the inspection through Customs and Excise so as to involve one point of contact. I appreciate the broad welcome that those announcements have received in the House.

We take these issues seriously and I welcome the annual assessment, as it is important that we consider the progress that is made. Hon. Members should understand, however, that we also have to put risks in perspective. Border entry posts are important, but they are but one of a range of issues relating to minimising disease risks. However, we take all the issues seriously and we will take action where it is needed.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 47.

Mr. Morley: I beg to move Government amendment (a) to the Lords amendment, leave out lines 12 to 29.

We are not disagreeing with the argument that there is a need for effective contingency planning. We have no argument with that. Indeed, the 2001 epidemic demonstrated very early on that the contingency plans that we had in place were clearly inadequate for dealing with an epidemic of that scale and type. We freely acknowledge that. Our experience in that epidemic has

[Mr. Morley]

resulted in the rewriting of contingency plans by every country, as it is recognised that a complete rethink is required in organisational terms and in the way in which the matter is addressed.

The main purpose of the provision as it was originally drafted was to provide an assurance that the Government are serious about being prepared for any possible future outbreak of FMD. We recognise that various inquiry reports have highlighted that good contingency planning and better preparedness are crucial at the outset of any future disease outbreak. That is why we have taken immediate action to update our interim contingency arrangements for FMD and why we have updated them again in the light of the Government's response to the two independent reports. We want to develop the arrangements further in consultation with the industry, stakeholders and interested parties to address the wide range of issues thrown up in 2001.

As policies develop, the plans will be reviewed and amended accordingly. We do not want the documents merely to assume that once we have put in place a contingency plan, it will be permanent and will cover all the points raised. Even if people have signed up to such a plan, we do not accept that that is enough, and we recognise that any contingency plan will have to be periodically reviewed to ensure that it is up to date. We must accept and develop proposals concerning, for example, the administration of vaccination, which we discussed earlier. That would ensure that issues such as vaccination could be integrated into an overall plan that relates to all aspects of disease control policy. That provision has also been built into the contingency plan, again reflecting the recommendations made in the independent reports.

Contingency planning needs to cover the control of diseases using a range of measures, including culling and/or emergency vaccination as appropriate, and to take account of the context of relevant EU legislation. I anticipate that, when we have had extensive consultation, the completed contingency plan will be laid before Parliament for the first time in the spring.

The incidence of diseases worldwide and their possible occurrence in the UK will also contribute to establishing the priority to be given to extending the provisions of the contingency plan from foot and mouth disease to cover other exotic diseases. A number of hon. Members have spoken of the risk posed by a range of diseases. We take that risk extremely seriously. We are therefore putting in place a risk-based approach, and our aim is to target our resources based on what we know about the risk posed by different exotic diseases. The most effective way to make the best use of the available resources is to identify exactly where the risks are, and to determine where to apply the resources so as to deal with those risks.

The requirements that have been added to the original Bill by proposed new sections 14A(2) and 14A(3) do not relate to the purpose of the clause, which is to define a requirement for a contingency plan to deal with occurrences of disease. On that, we have no disagreement. The proposed new sections would not allow us to target our resources appropriately. Proposed new section 14A(2) would require us to expend a great deal of resources in relation to all the diseases in schedule 2A, which is included in the Bill to deal, more than anything else, with issues of deliberate infection, rather than to distinguish between the diseases in terms of an assessment of the risk occurrences in the UK.

We need to carry out significant worldwide surveillance for exotic disease, and this already takes place. The relevant information is available from international sources such as the OIE. The risk to the UK comes not from countries that report honestly to the OIE, but from those that do not report their disease situation or that have no effective mechanism for diagnosing or reporting disease, and in which, by definition, a three-yearly review would be completely valueless because there is no available information. That is not to say, however, that the concerns expressed in the other place are not being addressed. We take them very seriously. However, the additional provisions—proposed new sections 14A(2) and 14A(3)—are more relevant to other activities of government, such as the prevention of disease.

The Government announced earlier this afternoon their response to the FMD inquiry reports, and it is in that response that we have set out how we will take forward work on the recommendations that have been made. That is where the broader issues of strategy have properly been addressed. I do not, therefore, consider the proposed new sections 14A(2) and 14A(3) appropriate in the context of the contingency plan provisions. That is why I am seeking to remove them from the Bill. I am doing so not because we have any objection to a public commitment to proper contingency planning—or to ensuring that those contingency plans are properly consulted on and that people have every opportunity to participate in that consultation—but because the provisions are unnecessary. They do not sit well in the Bill. There is no major disagreement on this, but, if we are to have proper legislation, it should be just that. In that regard, the proposals are unnecessary and I invite the House to reject them.

Mr. Hayes: The Minister says that he is committed to a national contingency plan, but, without being ungenerous, I must point out that there would not have been a provision for a national contingency plan, or an import clause or a biosecurity clause, in the Bill, were it not for the amendments tabled by Conservative—in particular—and Liberal Democrat peers during the course of the Bill through the other place and in Committee. If the Minister looks sceptical about that, I shall remind him that it was my noble Friend Baroness Byford who tabled a strategy amendment in Committee, thus facilitating those elements.

It is also important to point out, when considering the contingency plan, the nature of the plan that was in place when we endured the catastrophe of the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak. That plan had gaps, and it had not been shared or rehearsed outside the state veterinary service. Neither had it been tested. It was described by the Government's own report on the issue as follows:

"The first responses to the early cases were not fast enough or effectively coordinated".

Yet the Government's memo to the inquiry stated that

"comprehensive contingency plans were in place".

The inquiry, however,

"did not find this to be so".

It found the plans to be limited in scope, out of date and not integrated into a national programme of rehearsal and testing. It also stated:

"Better preparation . . . would have done much to limit the scale of the crisis."

Brigadier Alex Birtwistle, who led the Army's handling of last year's outbreak, said that

"there was a startling level of incompetence at every level...we're one of the 10 richest nations, we're a legitimate nuclear power and we can't get a few trucks into Cumbria."

That is what the soldier who led the exercise said, so it is right and proper that the Government have concluded, albeit belatedly, that we need a properly co-ordinated, cohesive national plan to deal with such outbreaks.

10.30 pm

The contingency plan for last year's outbreak was inadequate, but such planning is surely essential to limit the scale of animal disease outbreaks. The Lords are merely emphasising that and aiming for an extension in scope. That scope needs to be broad because, as the Minister has acknowledged, disease can be introduced to this country from other places.

Many diseases are rife. For example, we know that blue tongue disease is well established in the United States and other diseases are well established in parts of Europe. We need to be aware of them, as they could be introduced to this country. We certainly need a European and worldwide perspective on the incidence of those diseases; the likelihood of this country being affected by them; and how we would respond. The Lords simply ask for a three-yearly review of the worldwide incidence of each disease referred to in the measure, which I think the whole House would acknowledge is appropriate, and that that review be debated.

Members might argue that the review should be undertaken more frequently than every three years; I would certainly not want it to occur less frequently. Neither would I want, as the Minister suggested, to rely on existing practice rather than support what the Lords are trying to achieve, which is a more holistic perspective than that which the Government seem willing to adopt.

That is particularly important given what we have said about the volume and nature of illegal meat imports, which, in themselves, are potential sources of disease, and because more people are travelling. There is enormous growth in the number of visitors to this country and there are all sorts of increased risks of disease being introduced. The Anderson report says that we should be producing

"not just a written document."

Rather, we should put

"in place the systems, processes and a culture to respond effectively to crises."

That comment, which was referred to by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), lies at the heart of the need to draw up, implement and test an effective contingency plan.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, especially as I am sure he agrees that one problem when the foot and mouth outbreak hit was that so many people did not know what to do. One advantage to the Lords amendment is that the plan would have to be circulated to all the parties that could possibly help. That means that many more people would know exactly what to do, which would make the Government's job a lot easier.

Mr. Hayes: Part of such a national plan must be the dissemination of information in an easily accessible and comprehensible form. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that such information needs to be spread not just to those directly affected—people in the industry—but to all those who may have contact with livestock during their work or leisure activities. The more knowledge we can spread on risk and its avoidance, the more likely we are to avoid a catastrophe of the proportions that we unfortunately suffered in 2001.

It seems to me, however, that we need to go further even than my hon. Friend suggests. We need to expand training, education and public awareness. We certainly need to support research and animal disease diagnostics. We need to reinforce the links between the Government, local government, other agencies and the industry to deliver a co-ordinated response. We need to strengthen that network to deliver a co-ordinated approach and we need to develop and, perhaps most importantly, test emergency preparation and disaster recovery plans.

Part of the problem from which we suffered while enduring that disease and that epidemic was the inadequate testing of the plans that were in place. A disaster recovery plan needs to be not only tested, but dynamic and flexible enough to be changed and applied in ways appropriate to the local conditions, the particular nature of the disease and its progress.

The Government seem to have belatedly concluded that we need a contingency plan. They seem to have taken on board a number of suggestions made in Committee and in the other place. But they have yet to grasp fully the need for a wide-ranging contingency plan that will take full account of all the diseases that may affect our farmers and their livestock.

I believe that, in respect of both the international dimension and the dissemination of information, the Lords amendments are useful and helpful additions to the plan. I hope that my colleagues will join me in supporting them and rejecting the Minister's objections to them.

Mr. Morley: The part of Lords amendment No. 47 that we want to delete has been dealt with by our commitment in the Bill—approved by the House—in relation to vaccination.

We accept, and I have conceded, that our existing contingency plan was not adequate in the circumstances, but it is not true that it was not tested. One of the many myths that were circulated was that the Government were aware of the disease before it was reported. It started because one of our divisional officers was ringing around checking the prices of such things as timber, as part of a contingency exercise. Moreover, the plan was reviewed as recently as 2000 in connection with the European Union review. We accept, however, that all those reviews and tests were not adequate. We are therefore approaching the matter in a much more sophisticated way.

[Mr. Morley]

We also accept that all contingency planning must be made public. Some Conservative Members were very critical of the Government when we made public our contingency plan for BSE in sheep. One or two of them said that it was a disgrace that we had put our plans into the public domain, because it might affect sheepmeat sales and upset the industry and consumers. [*Interruption.*] I have a long memory, and I assure Conservative Members that there was a great deal of criticism when we made the plan public. That is, however, the right thing to do. We also recently made public our contingency plan for blue tongue virus, so that people could comment, and we are committed to doing the same in regard to such issues in future.

Mr. Drew: Obviously, a national contingency plan is only as good as what can be done within the nation. I know that the point of such plans is the need to consider what is happening abroad, and I know about the OIE process of recognising diseases that are prevalent elsewhere, but this is all to do with intelligence, and I wonder about the extent to which we would share that openly. We must have some certainty that we can act before people do things that we would not want them to do.

Mr. Morley: I entirely agree. That is another aspect of the Lords' amendments to which I object. To be fair, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) recognised that a three-yearly review might not be appropriate—that the period might be too long. In fact, I have made it clear that in many cases it would be irrelevant. Legislation should not contain elements that, although well-meaning, are irrelevant and already covered by our responses—our response in the Bill, our commitment to making contingency plans public for consultation and our detailed response to independent inquiries, which we have also made public and made available to the House. In that respect, we accept the thrust of the arguments. We do not disagree with the comments that the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings made in relation to contingency planning and contingency arrangements, but they contradict his earlier point that contingency plans must be dynamic documents. We need to be able to respond and update them. In that sense, it is not appropriate to write contingency arrangements into the Bill as that makes it difficult to update and modernise them. When making primary legislation, it is important to be clear about its objectives, functions and role. Proper detailed contingency plans and arrangements can be made without writing them into the Bill because of the need for updating and flexibility, for involving people and for ensuring that there is proper contribution and comment.

For those reasons, I do not think that there is a great deal of disagreement among hon. Members. We all agree on the need for proper, detailed contingency planning. That commitment will be clear in the Bill, which has been amended during its passage through the House. I ask the House not to include in the Bill irrelevant, unworkable measures that cannot react to changing circumstances. That is not good legislation, nor was it the intention of the movers of the amendment, who I am sure were well-motivated. I therefore urge the House to reject it and to support the Government amendment.

Question put, That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 164.

Division No. 359] **[10:41 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*

Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes: Jim Fitzpatrick and Gillian Merron

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John

Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Francois and
Mr. David Wilshire

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment, as amended, agreed to [Special Entry].

Lords Amendment No.65 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

It being more than six hours after the commencement of business, MR. SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Remaining Lords amendments agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 13: Mr. Nick Ainger, Andrew George, Mr. John Hayes, Mr. Elliot Morley and Mr. Andy Reed; Mr. Elliot Morley to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to Lords amendment No. 13 reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

PETITIONS

Iraq

10.56 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I have pleasure in presenting a petition collected by my constituent Mrs. Rachel von Kimmelmann of 4, Thornwall Way, Wincanton. It expresses the concern of a number my constituents at the prospect of a pre-emptive war against Iraq. I have attempted to express the same view in this House.

The petition states:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of Residents of Somerton and From and others sheweth

That a pre-emptive war against Iraq would be both immoral and in contravention of the United Nations Charter, and would have unjust an unacceptable consequences for innocent civilians living in the Middle East.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the Government to work with the United Nations and to use its influence to encourage the use of all peaceful and diplomatic means to reincorporate the country of Iraq into the international community.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Drugs

10.57 pm

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): Before I present this petition, I should like to pay tribute to the *Taunton Times* and to Gillian Powell for working with me to raise the 1,000 signatures of constituents from Taunton and Taunton Dene. The aim is that all drugs should be made freely available to all patients on the basis of clinical need alone.

The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of the concerned readers of the *Taunton Times* and residents of the constituency of Taunton in Somerset sheweth

That the "wonder drug" STI571 (Glivec), which has been shown to cure seven out of 10 cases of chronic myeloid leukaemia, was already widely available in western Europe and the United States of America; welcomes that it is now freely available to all those as recommended by their clinicians; and that there should be no financial consideration for any other drugs as to whether a patient should or should not receive treatment.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House shall urge the Secretary of State to make it his policy to ensure that all drugs are made freely available to all patients on the basis of clinical need alone.

Your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Food Supplements

10.59 pm

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): I wish to present a petition signed by 100 of my constituents.

The petition states:

The petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have, for many years, maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies, and fears that the European food supplements directive and proposed European directive on traditional herbal medicinal products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

NHS Funding for East London

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

11 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I am delighted to participate in this debate on behalf of the citizens of east London. I have recently had extensive discussions with the primary care trusts of Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham, the major local hospitals, including the Homerton, Barts and the London, the East London and the City mental health NHS trust and the north-east London health authority. Put boldly, we all agree that the way in which the NHS is funded in the United Kingdom is unjust and unfair, leading to unnecessary pain and suffering and even early deaths in east London.

For too many local people, life really is nasty, brutish and short—thanks, in large part, to an outdated and antiquated funding formula. The formula has to change, not at some distant time over the horizon but within the next few weeks, before the forthcoming three-year settlement; our people will settle for no less. Those who think otherwise must think again unless they wish to see blood on the House of Commons carpets.

The NHS in east London has suffered from years of chronic underfunding. Despite the Chancellor's announcement in March of major sustained growth in NHS funding, east London remains one of the most under-resourced health communities in England. Over the past three years, the former East London and the City health authority has been below its target share of resources. Since April 2000 alone, it has missed out on more than £90 million of funding—a staggering figure.

In the face of persistent inequities in funding and mounting demand, this divide must be closed now. East London is currently £26 million behind where it should be in funding terms, and there is absolutely no justification for that. Unless urgently tackled, the gap between the best and the worst-funded health systems will continue to grow, resulting in even greater inequalities.

The case for east London is simple but powerful. A sound, equitable and transparent system for the allocation of funding is essential, particularly now, as we move into a new era of three-year revenue allocations direct to primary care trusts. The new formula must recognise that east London is an area of exceptional ethnic and cultural diversity with some of the worst social and economic deprivation in the country. We need to get the formula right; the cost of providing existing health services rises year on year as new treatments become available and the number of the heaviest users of these services—the very young and older people—increases.

Serious flaws in the current method of funding exist in eight key areas where improvements must be made. They relate to population projections, demography, general practice work load, diversity of the population, refugee health, forensic psychiatry, staff market factors and child and maternal health. I will touch tonight on just three of those factors—population projections, general practice work load and child and maternal health.

On population projections, a major concern is that over time the census-derived estimates issued by the Government have become increasingly unreliable. For example, in April 2001, 779,915 patients were registered with GPs in east London and the City, compared with the mid-year estimate of relevant population by the Office for National Statistics of 666,725—a variance of 17 per cent., and the fourth highest in the country. The average variation for England overall is just 4 per cent. East London's population is growing rapidly and has a much larger proportion of young adults than the rest of England. That growth has been most marked among five to 14-year-olds, 15 to 24-year-olds and 25 to 44-year-olds—the least funded groups. At least 142,000 homes are planned for the area in the next 10 years, so improvements to the quality and quantity of health services are essential to cope with the resultant demands.

As for general practice work loads, a feature of east London's practice not adequately reflected in the national resource allocation formula is the high turnover of patients. Applying recent research findings to east London, we see that patient turnover generates an additional 54,000 consultations for GPs and 28,000 consultations with nurses a year. The existing formula simply does not recognise that. Fair shares for non-discretionary expenditure should reflect the work load pressures faced by primary care, and would include recognition that patient turnover is a major determinant of work load. Moreover, 25 per cent. of GPs in east London are due to retire within five years. There are eight to 12 annual GP consultations in east London per patient, compared with a national average of five. Again, the existing formula does not recognise the enormous burden that that places on heroic local GPs.

As for child and maternal health, in addition to having some of the highest infant mortality rates in the country, east London has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy. It also has high numbers of children with low birth weight, a result of premature delivery and complications during pregnancy such as gestational diabetes and hypertension. Meanwhile, maternity services in east London are operating with 50 per cent. staff vacancy rates, and their models of care need substantial updating. The existing formula does not recognise that. Poverty can damage children's esteem, affecting their future mental health and life chances. Prevalence of psychiatric disorder in children in inner London is 13 per cent., compared with 6.8 per cent. nationally. Again, the existing formula does not recognise that.

Perinatal and infant mortality rates are higher in east London than in the rest of the country. Stillbirths and deaths within the first seven days—perinatal mortality—are over a third higher than nationally. Infant mortality—deaths within the first year—is over a fifth higher. In simple terms, a baby born in Hackney is at more than double the risk of dying in the first year of life than a baby born in Bexley. A baby boy born in Newham is likely to die nearly six years earlier than a baby boy born in Westminster. That is appalling. How can the Minister justify a system that is killing us in the east end so early? What have the citizens of east London done to Ministers and civil servants at the Department of Health to warrant such early graves? The situation cannot continue.

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

East London also has a high fertility rate. The 2001 census showed that there were more under-one-year-olds than in any other part of the country. Newham had the highest proportion of children aged under 16 in the country. The area is increasingly densely populated; Hackney, for example, has the fourth highest population density in the country. The formula must begin to recognise that.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): My hon. Friend referred to mobility and patient turnover. In my constituency, some GP lists change by more than 20 per cent. every year, and that must be recognised in the formula. Will my hon. Friend ask the Minister whether any suggested change in the formula can first be tested in the east London area so that we can avoid an even greater widening of the health inequalities that he described?

Mr. Sedgemore: I am grateful for that intervention. I mentioned an overall figure for east London of 17 per cent., but my hon. Friend has informed us that the figure for Tower Hamlets is 20 per cent. I accept that her figure is correct. That means that there is an incredible increase in the number of GP and nurse consultations. I should prefer the problem to be dealt with, but if there is to be an experiment, I agree with my hon. Friend that it should be carried out in east London.

I do not want only to whinge in this debate. East London has demonstrated what can be achieved despite the challenging financial straits it faces. The area has a proven track record in delivering first-class services. Examples of new services in recent years include one-stop cardiology; community diabetology; chronic disease management; Newham language shop telephone interpreting services; stop smoking programmes and the Nile centre for Afro-Caribbeans with serious mental illness.

The additional resources provided by the changes that we want would provide the following key developments for east London. They would address serious recruitment and retention issues, especially in primary care; improve the quality of, and access to, primary care; extend the disintegrating population screening and immunisation programmes; integrate hospital and community mental health services, while reducing pressure on acute services; provide better new-entrant screening for refugees and asylum seekers—which we should have been discussing more thoroughly yesterday than some of the subjects that were raised—with better support and training for local services; improve screening, foot care and vascular services for diabetics; and work with community groups to expand their work to meet the needs of all minority ethnic groups in east London, including better advocacy and translation.

The message is simple: give east London the funding to catch up and to bridge the existing health inequality divide and we will deliver the first-rate services that our citizens deserve.

11.13 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) on securing this debate on national health service funding for east London.

I have listened to and appreciated my hon. Friend's comments, despite the threatening tone in which some of them were expressed. I am sure that represents the passion that he and other hon. Friends in the Chamber who represent east London constituencies bring to the debate.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge east London's good record in delivering high quality services and pay tribute to all the staff who are dedicated to that endeavour. I also acknowledge the document on funding the "Case for East London" cited by my hon. Friend, which was compiled by NHS organisations in east London. I, too, agree that this is a helpful paper and hope to talk about it in more detail a little later.

I think we would all accept that different parts of the country and different localities have different health needs. The national resource allocation formula that we use at present to determine fair shares for health authorities and primary care trusts already goes some way towards recognising that. The formula takes account of the age structure of the local population. Patterns of morbidity, or levels of sickness, vary by age group. The very young and the elderly, whose populations are not evenly distributed around the country, make more use of health services than the rest of the population.

Ms King: Does my hon. Friend recognise that a further change gave greater weighting to the elderly, which meant that east London lost out as, unfortunately, a lot of our older people have moved away or passed away?

Jacqui Smith: I will return to that important issue and the question of infant deaths, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch, a little later, if my hon. Friend will allow me. We do recognise that although the existing formula already takes into consideration the variation in the cost of providing health services across different parts of the country and health needs, it has been criticised—passionately, this evening—for failing to get health resources to the areas of greatest health need. East London—where there are high levels of deprivation and where the financial cost of delivering patient services is also high—is a case in point. That is why we have set up a wide-ranging review of the allocation formula. The NHS plan stated that

"by 2003, following the review of the existing weighted capitation formula used to distribute NHS funding, reducing inequalities will be a key criterion for allocating NHS resources to different parts of the country".

The review of the formula has been carried out under the auspices of the advisory committee on resource allocation. ACRA is an expert body, and its academic members include Professor Sir Brian Jarman, emeritus professor of general practice at the Imperial college of medicine, Professor Glennerster, professor of social policy at the London school of economics, and other individuals with a wide range of relevant experience and expertise from within and outside the NHS.

The researchers working on the new formula were asked specifically to look at potentially new and better measures of deprivation. We are currently considering ACRA's recommendations and I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch that we intend to introduce the new formula for the next round of NHS allocations. These allocations will be announced later this year and will cover the three years 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 and will go directly to locally run primary care trusts. It is worth noting that moving to direct allocations to primary care trusts will enable resources to be much more closely matched to the needs of local people.

The review has already enabled us to make progress towards fairer resource allocation in areas that are particularly challenging to east London. In the 2001–02 allocations, we introduced a health inequalities adjustment. This targeted resources at the most deprived areas. We provided £130 million for this in 2001–02 and increased it by 14 per cent. to £148 million in 2002–03. East London and City health authority received over £6 million of this for 2002–03 and just over £3 million in 2001–02.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch and my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) referred to infant deaths. For 2002–03, the rates of years of life lost—which form the basis of the health inequalities adjustment—were extended to include infant deaths under one year from all causes. That followed the announcement of an additional target for tackling health inequalities based on infant mortality. I recognise the point raised about the particular needs in those communities where, for a range of reasons, infant mortality is likely to be high, as well as the need to ensure that the way in which we distribute resources recognises that.

In the same year, we also introduced a cost of living supplement that targeted resources at locations where NHS employers faced the most pressing recruitment and retention issues. East London received more than £4.9 million for that in 2002–03 and more than £3.6 million in 2001–02. We also announced in the NHS plan that there would be a new way of distributing resources to address inequities in primary care services. I recognise the concerns expressed by my hon. Friends this evening about the particular challenges for primary care, and especially for GPs, in the areas that they represent. They are right, of course, that the ability to recruit, retain and fund those crucial activities in primary care are important for their constituents, which we have borne in mind in our new unified allocations. We shall continue to consider that as we move forward with the formula.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I support everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) said. He and other colleagues who have spoken raised a specific point about population mobility and how it bears down on resources and on GPs. Is there any possibility in the future of the formula taking into account population mobility? As we know, there are excellent services in the area—I had my baby in Homerton hospital, and I could not have had better care anywhere. As the Minister will also know, however, east London saw a swathe of hospital closures in the 1980s and 1990s: the Mothers hospital, the old Hackney hospital, St. Leonard's, and the Queen Elizabeth II hospital. We were promised increased resources for primary care, and we are still waiting to see them.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the particular pressures that come from population disruption as much as from population numbers. I believe that we already recognise, in the way in which we distribute primary care resources, some elements of that disruption, but she makes a very strong case. That is something that we need to consider in the way in which we allocate resources, and in the way in which we target some of the additional support that I shall talk about in a moment.

In relation to primary care in particular, it is important to note that Department approval has been given for two first-wave local improvement finance trust schemes, one of which is in east London and the City. The East London and City LIFT Project will bring £30 million of new investment into primary care buildings in the first wave. Most people's experience of the NHS is in primary care environments and that much-needed investment will make an important difference to the east London community.

I said earlier that I would talk about the "Case for East London" paper, and I know that east London NHS organisations have completed a helpful analysis of the pressures facing those wanting to provide high-quality patient care, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has referred. All NHS services throughout the country have been under pressure to deal with the demands placed on them day to day, and the historic increases in NHS spending announced recently should help the whole of the NHS in that respect. That, and the reforms to the NHS, in which decisions about patient care are devolved to local decision makers, means that the NHS in London should in future be in a better position to deal with the pressures under which it currently works. That takes time, but we recognise the need—and the pressure from hon. Members—to do that as quickly as possible.

The priorities and planning framework, which was recently distributed by the Department, sets out what we believe are the national priorities for the NHS and social care provision. That, combined with the details of the financial allocations that will be made available, will ensure that the NHS in east London will know what is expected of it, and what levels of resource distributed under a reviewed formula it will have to deliver high-quality patient care. Analysis calls for a review of how the relative needs of different populations are to be assessed and taken into account in national resource allocation decisions. The issues raised are complex, but deprived populations undoubtedly place additional demands on services due to their increased levels of need. Many of the factors that hon. Friends highlighted are known to increase the need for services. The weighted capitation formula attempts to capture many of those for hospital and community health services. As I said, the formula review will further refine consideration of those pressures.

I want to make clear the levels of funding that have been going into east London over the past few years. The "Case for East London" paper highlights only some of those. East London and the City health authority

[Jacqui Smith]

received more than £225 million extra in revenue allocations in the past five years. It also received an increase in 2001–02 of £68 million. For 2002–03, it received an allocation of £703 million, which represents a real terms increase of nearly 11 per cent. above the average throughout the country. In addition, of the £2.5 billion being invested in major capital to redevelop and build brand new hospitals across London, a community facility in Newham costing £3 million was completed in April 2002 and is now open, and a £14 million mental health unit in Newham was opened this July.

I recognise that there is a particular demand on mental health services in my hon. Friend's area. Barts and the London trust is considering proposals from two private sector bidders for a £620 million development programme. That will include the creation of a world-class cancer and cardiac centre at Barts and the building of a new teaching hospital at Whitechapel. The decision to build on both sites reversed the previous Government's decision to close Barts, the country's oldest hospital, altogether.

We have been working hard on addressing some of the issues highlighted in east London and by my hon. Friends. For example, we have funded a number of personal medical service pilots that focus on refugee and asylum-seeking communities. Those pilots address access to primary care services for those communities, as well as encouraging opportunities for health professionals from those communities to gain employment in the NHS locally. Private medical services have an important role to play in GP recruitment in areas such as east London because they provide a different way in which GPs can operate within the health service.

East London's approach to delivering language services is among some of the best practice in London. We are building on that by disseminating good practice and initiating discussion across the city on the London language plan. Regional colleagues in London are working with partners such as the King's Fund to encourage more local people to train as community bilingual advocates, which my hon. Friend also highlighted.

Work in east London highlights the pressure being put on local staff. That is why we recently set out the work force challenge facing the capital over the next few years to modernise services and respond to the growing population in London. We are working with a range of organisations in east London to see how we can recruit more people locally, thereby meeting our work force needs and acting as a spur to local regeneration and to tackling poverty and unemployment. In that way, we hope to alleviate the need for health care, which my hon. Friend rightly linked to poverty and deprivation, and to increase the capacity of the NHS to respond.

The Government recognise that poverty and deprivation bring not only excess morbidity and mortality but extra costs to local health services. I assure my hon. Friends that we will continue to provide extra health resources in areas of greatest health need to recognise, as my hon. Friend does, the ambitions of local health services in east London to provide the best service possible for constituents.

11.30 pm

Sitting suspended, pursuant to order [29 October].

On resuming—

Question agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 7 November 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Stability and Growth Pact

1. **Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): What representations have been made in respect of recent changes to the stability and growth pact. [78221]

3. **Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): What assessment he has made of the economic implications of non-compliance by member states in the euro-zone with the stability and growth pact. [78224]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): I have received no recent representations on the stability and growth pact, but when I attended the ECOFIN meeting in Brussels on Tuesday it was agreed to invoke the excessive deficit procedure with respect to Portugal. Since 1997, the Government have consistently supported a prudent interpretation of the pact that takes into account the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment. We continue to discuss this with our European Union colleagues.

Mr. Burnett: Portugal, Germany and France are all in breach, or about to be in breach, of the pact's deficit limit. Does the Chancellor believe that there is an urgent need for reform of the pact and that, until that reform has been implemented and the stalled Lisbon agenda has been satisfactorily concluded, it would be reckless to recommend to the British people that we join the single currency?

Mr. Brown: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is speaking for his party. It is correct that the excessive deficit procedure has been started in relation to Portugal. It is possible that it may be started in relation to Germany, and probable that not an excessive deficit procedure but an early warning procedure may be adopted in relation to France.

Since 1997, we have always taken the view that the pact contains three elements that need reform. First, it should take more account of the economic cycle. I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree with that. Secondly, countries with a high level of debt should be treated differently from countries with a low level, and a country—there are three of them—with debt above 100 per cent. of gross domestic product should be treated differently from countries such as ours, with debt of less than 40 per cent. of GDP. Thirdly, there is public investment: we believe that, as long as they have a sustainable debt level, those who are investing for the future should be in a position to continue to do so. We continue to discuss those changes with our EU colleagues. I hope that there is consensus in the House that those reforms are needed.

Mr. Hopkins: My right hon. Friend will know that, following the meeting on Tuesday, some of us were concerned about the decisions that were made. Given that Germany is teetering on the brink of dangerous deflation, would not forcing the Germans to intensify that deflation by further fiscal tightening drive them into recession, and would not that cause a crisis in the euro zone as a whole? What would the implications for Britain be; and does he agree that Romano Prodi's description of the pact as "stupid" is something of an understatement?

Mr. Brown: Adjectives are widely used these days in a pejorative sense, be it "stupid" or "nasty", or any other such word. I would refrain from using such adjectives. The point of our proposed reforms is to be able to distinguish between structural and cyclical deficit. That is part of the debate about the German position: whether the deficit is structural or cyclical. There is absolutely no doubt that we face a world downturn. This is the first synchronised world downtown for 30 years, seriously affecting every continent. It is also true that we suffer from the fact that, while in the last recession world trade went down by only 1 per cent., and it grew by 13 per cent. two years ago, it has been stagnant last year and this year, creating difficult conditions for all countries.

On my hon. Friend's point about the stability and growth pact, we should be in a position to distinguish between structural and cyclical deficits, and I hope that he will agree that action is needed for a structural deficit, but that for a cyclical one we can consider the cycle and what is likely to happen over a number of years.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that the Chancellor has no objection in principle to ceding sovereignty over monetary policy to the European Central Bank, which we do not elect and cannot remove, and which, under the terms of the treaties, it would be illegal to seek to persuade to the view of the British Parliament, why does he think that, when he claims to believe that this country should retain control over tax and expenditure decisions, we should believe a word of what he says?

Mr. Brown: It is interesting to note that the hon. Gentleman has moved to the Back Benches to say exactly what he said on the Front Bench. I thought that he was going to take a distinct position. It is Parliament that makes decisions on taxation and spending; it is Parliament that made its decision on the Maastricht treaty. The Maastricht treaty contained all the terms under which the stability pact now operates, including the requirement to submit convergence plans and the

requirement to avoid excessive deficits, and the measures that might be taken in respect of that. It was Parliament that voted in favour of that—and the House should know that the shadow Chancellor was a member of the Cabinet that put those proposals to Parliament.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Is it not the case that not only the growth and stability pact but the whole Maastricht enterprise, and the common monetary policy established by it, are flawed? Is that not evidenced by what is happening in Germany, where a democratically elected Government have no jurisdiction over the value of the currency, no control, in effect, over public expenditure, and no jurisdiction over interest rates?

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend, who was a Minister in the Labour Government of the 1970s, has at least been consistent in this: he opposed the Maastricht treaty and he continues to oppose it, unlike many Conservative Members, who brought in the Maastricht treaty but now wish to oppose its provisions.

As for what my right hon. Friend says about the economy, being part of a monetary union involves a number of changes in the way we operate. That is exactly why we have submitted the proposal to the five economic tests. The tests will examine the effect on investment and employment, and the effect that arises from the flexibility of the British and the European economy to deal with problems such as those that we see at the moment, and others that can arise from time to time. They will also examine the sustainability of convergence.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will agree that this is the most detailed exercise that has been conducted by the Treasury—an exercise that was never conducted when the previous Government took this country into the exchange rate mechanism—*[Interruption.]* I can find almost no evidence of any work having been done in the Treasury on the economic issues—*[Interruption.]* I think, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I always worry when the Chancellor starts to lean on the Dispatch Box, because it means that his reply is getting very long.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Can the Chancellor tell us where in his five tests we find a reference to the difficulties caused by the stability and growth pact?

Mr. Brown: The five tests look at all those issues. They look at investment, employment and flexibility—and if the right hon. and learned Gentleman reads the submission that I made to the Treasury Select Committee, he will see that we consider specifically the issues of the stability and growth pact, and will publish a paper on the subject as part of the five tests. The question that the shadow Chancellor has to answer is why he once supported the stability and growth pact, yet now, for purely party political reasons, he opposes it.

Mr. Howard: It is for the Chancellor to answer questions, and he has not been able to point to a single reference to the stability and growth pact in the five tests. Are not the difficulties of the pact caused in large part by the inappropriateness of the "one size fits all" interest rate for so many economies in the euro zone? Has the Chancellor seen the study by the European Commission that showed that the single interest rate was too low for seven countries in the euro zone and too high for another three, which made it about right for just two countries?

Mr. Brown: The shadow Chancellor is entirely wrong. The evidence that I put to the Treasury Select Committee says specifically—*[Interruption.]* The shadow Chancellor is asking for this to be one of the tests—in other words, he wants a sixth test. What I am saying to him is that, as part of the five tests, when we consider employment, investment, flexibility and durability, we will be examining the operation of the stability and growth pact. *[Interruption.]* If he has any doubt about that, I will send him this afternoon the memorandum that we sent to members of the Treasury Select Committee—I see one member of the Select Committee nodding at that, because he knows it to be the case—saying that we would publish a paper on the stability and growth pact as part of our assessment of the five tests. There are five tests, not six, but as part of the five tests, which include employment, investment and flexibility, we shall look at the macroeconomic issues—[HON MEMBERS: "Order!"] The idea that we have not submitted evidence to the Treasury Select Committee saying that that is part of the review is completely wrong, and the shadow Chancellor will have to withdraw his allegation.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will my right hon. Friend ignore the bleating of the Liberal Democrats, who have been Euro-fanatics from the very beginning? Will he ignore the rants of the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, who condemned the current Leader of the Opposition when they were uniting and dying over Maastricht? Will my right hon. Friend also keep finding excuses for not going into the euro? He has managed that for five years—good luck to him.

Mr. Brown: We will publish the assessment that we are making of the five economic tests. It is serious, detailed and rigorous, and the most comprehensive piece of work that the Treasury has done. It will look at all the relevant issues, as the five tests make absolutely clear, and the House of Commons will have the fullest chance to debate the issues.

Climate Change Levy

2. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): What recent discussions he has had with manufacturers about the effect of the climate change levy on UK competitiveness. [78223]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Government have regular discussions with business about a wide range of issues, including matters related to tax.

Andrew Selous: Will the right hon. Lady tell the House whether the Government are considering the proposals of the Engineering Employers Federation, which would not only help the environment more quickly, but would be less burdensome to business? Is

she aware of the extreme difficulty caused to Linpac, a manufacturer in my constituency, which has had to move two of its moulding machines to Spain, where neither the climate change levy nor anything similar operates—a move that was demanded by one of its major customers? When the company briefed the Chief Secretary on the matter, he apparently turned to his officials and said, "Oh, it wasn't supposed to operate like this." What does the right hon. Lady have to say about that?

Dawn Primarolo: I am aware of the report that the hon. Gentleman refers to. As he will know, the initial report on the introduction of a climate change levy was undertaken by Lord Marshall. He recommended, and the levy went on to include, two principles: that the revenues from the levy would be recycled, and should be broadly revenue neutral; and that specific issues should deal with energy-intensive industries where they are subject to international competition. The levy undertakes both of those arrangements.

The hon. Gentleman will also know that the amount of revenue that is recycled to business—as a result of enhanced allowances, or the Carbon Trust, or directly through the national insurance rebate—is greater than the amount that the levy raises. The suggestions in the recent report confirm, therefore, that the Government are going in the right direction. However, they rightly raise issues that the Government need to scrutinise closely as the climate change levy beds in.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the climate change levy is a very important environmental tax, and that getting it right is important? I was pleased to hear her comments on that point, but does she also agree that we need a range of innovative environmental taxes that help industry to do the right thing, and that have the right touch? Will she continue with the environmental taxation review, and introduce measures in the near future?

Dawn Primarolo: I can of course confirm that the climate change levy contributes to the Government's programme in committing ourselves to reach our Kyoto targets. I should also remind my hon. Friend that, before the levy's introduction, there were some two years of consultation with business. That consultation continues, but, as he rightly says, climate change is a threat now, and we cannot wait for solutions tomorrow. We need to move forward on these issues, and the climate change levy is an important aspect of that agenda.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Is the Paymaster General proud of the fact that this Government have managed to combine the anti-competitive impact of the climate change levy with an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, as was recently pointed out by Friends of the Earth? Has she read the recent remarks of Digby Jones, Director General of the Confederation of British Industry, who said that the levy is

"damaging key sectors of the UK economy, driving jobs abroad, [and] has become a great friend to our French and Spanish competitors?"

Is that the Government's intended consequence of this bungled tax, or was the Chief Secretary right in what he said during a visit to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous)?

Dawn Primarolo: I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentlemen will be aware that at least seven other member states in the European Union have comparable measures and that others are moving to introduce them, precisely because we need to address the issue of climate change. As Lord Marshall's report clearly pointed out, the climate change levy includes reductions to assist energy-intensive industries that are subject to international competition. What the right hon. and learned Gentleman has to tell the House is whether he is serious, as the spokesman for the Opposition, about tackling climate change. If he is, how should it be done? Will he tell us whether he is prepared to commit himself now, or will it be another promise for tomorrow?

Waste Recycling

4. **Dr. Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test): What appraisal he has made of the case for the introduction of an incineration levy to encourage future re-use and recycling of waste. [78225]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The Government announced in the Budget 2002 that they would consider the case for a tax on incineration in the light of the strategy unit waste project, which is due to be completed later this autumn.

Dr. Whitehead: Will my hon. Friend also appraise the large, long-term contracts being entered into by local authorities that centre on waste incineration? When he considers such a levy, will he address how it might help local authorities move beyond their reliance on such contracts?

John Healey: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend as one of the House's renowned experts on the subject and I thank him for his question. The need to minimise the production of waste and maximise the re-use and recycling of waste is at the heart of our waste policies. Technologies, including incineration, have a role to play in recovering value from waste, whether through recycling, composting or energy from waste, as my hon. Friend's question suggests. We will consider the specific questions he raises, and also the general questions, in light of the waste report that the Prime Minister's strategy unit is currently completing and which we expect to be able to publish shortly.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Why is it that whenever the possibility of improving business behaviour arises, the Government's knee-jerk reaction is always to increase the number or rate of taxes? Is not this an opportunity to reduce taxes to encourage behaviour?

John Healey: We have cut corporation tax, capital gains tax and small business tax. On the incineration tax, I made it clear in my original answer that the

Government have agreed to consider the case—no more, no less—for a tax on incineration as part of the long-term waste management policies that we need to put in place.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does my hon. Friend agree that important though this issue is, the problem partly arises because of the sheer amount of packaging and unnecessary extra material that is thrust on consumers, whether we want it or not? Will he consider a levy on packaging or other ways to discourage firms from generating unnecessary waste with which consumers have to grapple?

John Healey: We have no plans to introduce or consider such a tax. The specific questions and the wider long-term aims of our waste policies will be considered in the light of the strategy unit's report, which is currently being completed and which we expect to be able to publish shortly.

Gross Domestic Product (East Sussex)

5. **Mr. Charles Hendry** (Wealden): What his latest figure is for the GDP of East Sussex; and what this is as a percentage of (a) the mean GDP across the country and (b) the highest GDP for a county. [78226]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): The latest sub-regional GDP data relate to 1998 and show that the GDP of East Sussex at current basic prices was £3,850 million. That represented 0.5 per cent. of total GDP for the UK. It is not meaningful to calculate mean and highest levels of GDP for counties, as counties vary in size.

Mr. Hendry: The Financial Secretary will be aware that East Sussex's GDP per head is the third lowest in the country, below Liverpool, Newcastle and Glasgow. The Government's plans for local authority spending could result in East Sussex losing £44 million a year, despite its GDP level. Will the hon. Lady therefore have urgent discussions with her ministerial colleagues to make sure that they understand that any system designed to make local government funding fairer—a Government objective—should assist poorer counties rather than penalise them?

Ruth Kelly: Perhaps I could point out that East Sussex has benefited from this Government's policies: unemployment has fallen by 46 per cent. in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and, as a result of personal tax and benefit measures since 1997, pensioners will be £1,150 better off on average by October of next year.

I do accept that we are not prepared to ignore pockets of deprivation in areas of prosperity. That is why we are committed to balanced regional economic growth, and why we are funding the regional development agencies at an average rate of 4.5 per cent. in real terms over the next few years. We are working extremely closely with the south-east economic development agency to make sure that East Sussex benefits from a major regeneration programme over the next 10 years.

HIPC Initiative

6. **Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): If he will make a statement on the outcomes of the World Bank and IMF meeting in September in relation to debt relief and the HIPC initiative. [78227]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): At the recent IMF and World Bank meetings in Washington, we agreed up to $1 billion of further debt relief for poor and indebted countries. I am pleased to announce that the UK has been joined by 16 other donors, which have already made firm commitments totalling $850 million to the HIPC trust fund. European Union member states have called on the Commission to make a contribution through the European development fund. That will benefit 26 highly indebted poor countries. Of the remaining 12 countries that could qualify for debt relief, nine are unfortunately in conflict, one has opted for debt relief, and two are developing their poverty reduction strategies to meet the conditions for debt relief.

We thank the Churches, faith groups and non-governmental organisations for the contribution that they have made to the debt relief campaign, but we are determined to build a longer-term solution to the financing of education, health and anti-poverty programmes in the poorest countries.

Dr. Tonge: I thank the Chancellor for that reply. At the risk of sending Tory Members into orbit, I freely acknowledge that the progress that has been made on this matter has been due largely to his efforts. However, does the Chancellor realise how disappointed people in the country are that more progress has not been made since the millennium? According to the organisation Jubilee 2000, the cancellation of debt for the 26 HIPC countries would cost around $6.8 billion over five years for the countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. That is probably less than the US spent on bombing Afghanistan. Will the Chancellor put pressure on the World Bank and the IMF at least to suspend debt repayment—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady may have been slow to start, but she is certainly making up for it now.

Mr. Brown: I want to thank all those in the House who have joined us in the campaign to secure debt relief. The figures show that $62 billion of debt will be wiped off as a result of the initiative so far. If other countries join the initiative, that total should amount to $100 billion. That is a very considerable figure, involving 26 countries, and it is yielding money for education, health and anti-poverty programmes. However, I readily accept that there is more to do. That is why we are considering, with other countries, further measures in addition to debt relief that can yield results both in terms of expenditure on education, health and anti-poverty programmes, and in terms of meeting the millennium development goals, which include ensuring that every child has an education.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I am sure that the whole House welcomes the moves that have been made to progress this matter, largely thanks to the moral lead

that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has taken. However, does my right hon. Friend accept that the collapse of commodity prices has caused real problems for many countries already in the HIPC initiative and receiving debt relief? What further measures can he take to ensure that those countries' future levels of sustainable debt are tied into the collapse of commodity prices? Will he assure the House that the $1 billion extra that has been promised will be new money and will not merely replace money that should have come from multilateral creditors such as the IMF and the World Bank?

Mr. Brown: The extra $1 billion is necessary precisely because of the economic conditions in poorer countries, and because in the first round of the HIPC trust fund we underestimated what would be needed to pay for the debt relief that has been provided. It is new money, and is being allocated by this Government and other Governments. As I said, 16 Governments have joined the initiative, and that is huge progress on where we were a few months ago.

Again, I readily accept that if we are to deal with the problems of poor countries and their agricultural producers, we need a wider settlement—a wider compact between rich and poor countries that involves not only debt relief but the opening up of trade, tackling agricultural protectionism and help for public and private investment in those countries. We also need substantially greater resources in overseas development aid.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): As the Chancellor well knows, I greatly sympathise with his efforts on the HIPC initiative. Given the Prime Minister's humiliating failure, however, even to know of in advance—let alone to prevent—the French and Germans stitching up a cosy deal between themselves on the common agricultural policy, the right hon. Gentleman will surely agree that that self-serving deal has done, and for years to come will do, much more damage to the economies of the developing world than anything that he might do to relieve poor countries' debt under the initiative. How happy is he that the Prime Minister has not taken any action to remedy the situation when one of his Treasury officials has said that every cow in the EU receives over $2 a day from Brussels, while a fifth of the world's population lives on only a dollar a day?

Mr. Brown: Those figures have been put out by me and by other people in the past year. We have to get action on the common agricultural policy. At the summit, a ceiling was agreed on the amount of money available for agriculture. Contrary to the wishes of some countries, what was left open was that further progress would be made at Doha and in the mid-term review of agricultural policy. I should have thought that the Conservative party would have supported the Prime Minister's efforts in that respect. These matters are open for Doha. We now need all parties to combine to make a success of Doha and persuade other countries that we must curb agricultural protectionism.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): What are the Government doing to put pressure on non-participating countries to get involved in the HIPC process—countries such as Romania, Iran and Libya? Are the Government offering support to the HIPCs that face legal challenges from those who are not participating in the HIPC process?

Mr. Brown: On the legal issue, we are looking into that matter. We had a list of the 37 countries, I think, that would qualify for HIPC debt relief. I have named the countries that have already benefited. Equally, those that are in conflict cannot benefit while they are in conflict. When countries are coming out of conflict, we have measures to enable them to get debt relief quickly if they pursue the necessary policies and if we can be sure that the money is going to poverty reduction. The three remaining countries, which do not include those on the list that my hon. Friend mentioned, are now part of the HIPC process and should be able to get debt relief readily and quite quickly.

As for adding others to the list, I do not think that that is the way forward; it is a more comprehensive solution to what levels of development aid we can get. That requires us to have policies that link improvements in access to trade, improvements in investment in the poorest countries, an end to the agricultural protectionism that is doing so much damage, and far more overseas aid. That is the way to deal with the problems of the countries that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Manufacturing Output

8. **Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): What assessment he has made of the change in output of manufacturing industry since January 2001; and if he will make a statement. [78330]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The contraction in United Kingdom manufacturing output, which began last year, was due to the sharpest slowdown in G7 industrial activity since 1975, but UK economic fundamentals remain sound and our macroeconomic framework leaves us well placed to respond to those challenges. The Government will publish an updated assessment of prospects for manufacturing in the forthcoming pre-Budget report.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Minister accept that whatever success the Government may have achieved in other parts of the economy, the deep and abiding recession in manufacturing is a matter of continuing concern? Does he also accept that in the past four years, an estimated 500,000 jobs have been lost across the United Kingdom? In my constituency in the Scottish borders, the number of people employed in manufacturing has fallen by 23 per cent. since 1995. Would it not be right for the Treasury team to engage in an onslaught on exchange rate policy rather than on the unemployed, to ensure that there are some manufacturing vacancies in prosperous businesses for job seekers in the future?

Mr. Boateng: There has undoubtedly been a decline in manufacturing across the G7. We are seeking to ensure that Scotland benefits not only from the macro-economic measures that we have taken, but from micro-economic measures such as the improvements that we

have made in the climate for research and development, and the steps that have been taken with the Scottish Executive to promote enterprise and manufacturing in Scotland. In 2001–02, that led to 61 new inward investment projects being created in Scotland—the equivalent of more than 6,000 new jobs. We intend to continue to work with the Scottish Executive to that end. That is the best hope for the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and for the people of Scotland and the United Kingdom generally.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): Manufacturing has taken a knock in the west midlands as well as in Scotland. However, does my right hon. Friend agree that short-term fixes such as fiddling with the exchange rate are not the way to deal with this? The Government have addressed the long-term approach to productivity by improving research and development as well as average skill levels.

Mr. Boateng: Low inflation, low interest rates and good, solid macro-economic foundations are, as my hon. and learned Friend accepts, the best hope for British industry. However, the important steps that we are taking, not least in relation to research and development and to science and technology, stand in marked contrast to the successive failures of Conservative Members over the years in their stewardship of the economy.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Does the Chief Secretary accept that manufacturing employment has gone up in the euro zone since 1997 while plummeting by 500,000 in this country since 1997? Does the Chief Secretary think that that is simply down to bad British business or that it might relate to Government policy, which has seen exchange rates remain uncompetitive, investment at record low levels and the longest manufacturing recession since 1981? As the Monetary Policy Committee has not been able, in a two-track, two-speed economy, to cut interest rates today, what do the Government plan to do with the rest of the policy armoury to help them?

Mr. Boateng: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's figures will stand up in Germany or bring much comfort there. Comparing our performance with that of the rest of the G7 shows that we have the highest employment rates and the lowest unemployment rates. That is a direct result of the policy of this Government and of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that aerospace is a crucial, high-skill and high-value industry to Lancashire, the north-west and the country as a whole? It has been hit particularly hard since 11 September last year. Will my right hon. Friend stress to the industry that the Government will give the maximum support possible to encourage research and development and training? They are crucial and, at a time when the industry is being squeezed, they should not be squeezed. In that way, we will ensure the future of the industry to the benefit of the country.

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend's interest in the aerospace and high-tech industries in his constituency and throughout the north-west is well known. We meet regularly with the aerospace industry. Recently, I visited the north-west and spoke with the vice-chancellors of the three major universities there. They are all working in close contact with the industry and the regional development agency. They are benefiting from our proposals not only on science and technology but on the additional funding for the RDA and the important bedrock that we have put in place for long-term research and development, particularly in large companies, and they will continue to benefit.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Is the Chief Secretary aware of the importance of the construction products industry, which is a full 20 per cent. of the total British manufacturing sector? Will he ensure that the Government deliver their promises in the public sector by building the schools, hospitals and road infrastructure that they promised in their public spending review and are way short on delivering, so that the construction products industry can benefit?

Mr. Boateng: I take that as a request from the hon. Gentleman for yet more investment in the public sector, but that rings pretty hollow given the Conservatives' record. They failed to invest in our infrastructure and in our schools and hospitals. While they are talking about it, this Government are doing it.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the large manufacturing losses in the Yorkshire region occurred because the mining machinery industry there has declined considerably? Will he favourably consider help for the mining industry to maintain its current output, which in turn will help to sustain the manufacture of mining equipment and machinery in the Yorkshire area, thereby saving jobs? Will he also accept my appreciation for the work that he and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor have done to help manufacturing in the Yorkshire region?

Mr. Boateng: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that he takes a keen interest not only in mining but in manufacturing, research, development, science and technology throughout his region. Our best hope for maintaining and developing the manufacturing base of his region lies in the encouragement of IT and innovation. That is the Government's commitment, and it will endure.

Pensions Taxation

10. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What assessment he has made of the impact of recent changes in pensions taxation. [78232]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): From April 2002, as a result of the Government's personal tax and benefit changes, pensioner households are, on average, £840 a year better off than in 1997.

Mr. Robathan: But is it not the Chancellor's policies that have so badly harmed people's private pensions and indeed their future in retirement, especially the fact that

more than £25 billion has been taken out of pension funds—£5 billion a year since the abolition of advance corporation tax relief?

Can the Minister confirm leaked reports from the Labour spin machine that the Chancellor plans further harm to people's pensions and futures by ending higher-rate tax relief on pension contributions and by taxing lump-sum payments on retirement, which are currently tax free?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman wholly misrepresents the situation. As he knows, and as has often been pointed out to the House, the abolition of payable tax credit was an essential part of wider corporation tax reforms, which included cutting both main and small company corporation tax rates. Since 1997, cuts in corporation tax have been worth more than £3.5 billion a year to companies, and pension funds benefit from that as well.

In relation to some of the measures that the hon. Gentleman cites, about which there has also been much speculation in the press, the Treasury has said repeatedly on numerous occasions that no proposal for the abolition of higher-rate tax reliefs has even been considered by Treasury Ministers, never mind agreed.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): My hon. Friend will be aware of the high number of pensioners in my constituency, where there are well over 13,500 pensioner households. I thank my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for the work that he has done to alleviate pensioner poverty, but will he reconsider the winter fuel allowance that people in my constituency receive in wintertime when it is needed the most? Will he consider upping it by £50 to £250 as soon as possible?

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for his support. Unlike the Conservatives, the Government have made tackling pensioner poverty a priority. We introduced not only the £200 winter fuel allowance, but also free eye tests for the over-65s. Furthermore, next year, we shall introduce the pension credit, which will reward the savings of low-income pensioners. I take my hon. Friend's question as a Budget representation and as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is here, I am sure that he will have listened to it.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): How can the Minister claim that the pension dividend tax has nothing to do with pension scheme closures? When Labour came into office, no large company schemes were closed to new entrants, but only five years later—a short time in the long-term business of pension provision—we have moved to a situation where the main pension schemes of fewer than half our largest companies are open to new entrants. How can the Chancellor and the Minister claim that those two events—the Chancellor's largest-ever stealth tax and the rapid closure of schemes—are not related? Is he the only person in the country who does not understand that if one takes £25 billion from pension funds and continues to take money at the rate of £5 billion a year it will have an effect on pension funds and schemes?

Ruth Kelly: Let me take this opportunity to put the facts that the hon. Gentleman mentions in context. The abolition of payable tax credits, for example, was equivalent to the difference of a tenth between the best and worst pension fund providers. I hardly think that he can criticise that measure when he knows that it is also being offset by a huge package of corporation tax cuts. He points to the closure of final salary schemes. Clearly, changes are taking place right across the world, partly as a result of changing work patterns, which mean that the structure is changing, but what really matters to people is the level of pension contributions going into pension funds. That is why we are working in partnership with the industry, employers and individuals to ensure that people can have the security of knowing that they have secure income in retirement.

Tax Credits (Publicity)

11. **Mr. Russell Brown** (Dumfries): What steps he is taking to publicise the new tax credits. [78233]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): We carried out a series of national road shows from 16 September to 11 October to highlight the launch of the tax credits campaign and to publicise the new tax credits. That includes the Inland Revenue sending out claim forms automatically to all existing claimants of working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit. It also includes a national advertising campaign, which started on 16 September, including television, radio, press and online advertising and specific measures to ensure that minority groups are aware of the new tax credits. That involves planning publicity specifically for ethnic minority radio stations and publications.

Mr. Brown: I thank my right hon. Friend for what she has done until now and, obviously, for what she will do in the coming weeks and months, but may I draw her attention to the current tax credits? Undoubtedly, hundreds of thousands of families have benefited from the working families tax credit, but I have some concerns about the uptake of the child care tax credit. I feel that more families should have become involved in it because not only is it an opportunity to provide finance to assist with child care costs, but I firmly believe that it is an opportunity to develop child care services in many places, particularly rural areas. May I ask her to put more emphasis on developing child care services and the support that the Government offer for that?

Dawn Primarolo: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that about 170,000 families who currently receive working families tax credit are benefiting specifically from the support to assist in the payment of child care expenses, but I also know, because he has raised this before in the House, that he shares my concern about the inflexibility of the current arrangements. The new tax credits will ensure that we will be able to respond as child care needs and costs change, rather than fixing things for a specific period.

With regard to the supply of child care professionals, my hon. Friend will also have noted that, in this year's spending review, my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary have allocated

substantial funds for future expenditure on child care to train, employ and provide new child care centres for working parents.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): What action is the Minister taking to end the subtle pressure that seems to be being applied to many people to receive their tax credits through bank accounts, rather than over the counter at post offices?

Dawn Primarolo: There is no subtle pressure. The new tax credit legislation, supported by the Liberal Democrats, specifically included an arrangement whereby the new tax credits could be paid directly into families' bank accounts. That is a very useful way, first, to ensure that the right person gets the right amount of money and, secondly, to assist in reducing the fraud that, unfortunately, has been causing considerable difficulties with giros and order books. Having completed the entire legislation on tax credits, I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman now say that, apparently, the Liberal Democrats will change their minds on that principle.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the working families tax credit form is fundamentally flawed and therefore open to abuse? Is she aware, for example, that to receive money for a year, claimants need only insert the registration number of an after-school care project, often without the knowledge of that provider? Will she investigate that abuse before it spreads throughout the country?

Dawn Primarolo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I know that he is keenly aware of the difficulties in ensuring that payment of child care tax credits is made to the right people. I reassure him that applications for payment of child care expenses will be rigorously scrutinised to ensure that the expenditure has been incurred and that the payment goes to the child care providers.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the statement on the pre-Budget report, which is eagerly anticipated, be an opportunity to clarify, if not modify, the situation on tax credits? Will the Minister therefore tell the House when the statement is finally to be made?

Dawn Primarolo: If the hon. Gentleman has seen the TV advertising campaign or taken the opportunity to read the pack that I sent him, he will be fully familiar with the tax credits, and he will be actively campaigning in his constituency to ensure that people receive those resources. As the advertising says, this is money with families' names on it, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will help his constituents to get it.

Tax Credits (Publicity)

12. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What proposals he has to reduce the tax liabilities of pensioners. [78235]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): We will increase the age-related personal allowances above inflation. As a result, from 2003-04, no pensioner aged 65 or over will pay tax unless their income reaches £127 a week.

Helen Jackson: I am grateful to the Minister for her answer. Does she recognise that pensioners who have saved throughout their working life or paid into an occupational pension fully support the proposal for a pension tax credit, which may reduce many pensioners' tax liability, but the level of awareness about what the proposal may mean for them in the next tax year is very low? What will my hon. Friend do to ensure that there is a significant increase in that awareness over the next six months?

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is fully aware of the need to promote the eligibility for the pension credit as widely as possible. That will be done, first, by ensuring that people know in good time that they may be entitled to it. Secondly, to ensure maximum take-up, the Government will run a wide-ranging campaign in which we will not only work with the media but avail ourselves of the knowledge of local agencies and partners.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Given that interest rates and annuity rates are very low and that the Government have made a raid on pension funds, does the Minister think that there is any merit in cutting the tax rate on pensioners' savings, particularly as it is usually money that they saved during their working life and on which they have paid tax?

Ruth Kelly: Most pensioners pay no income tax at all. Indeed, this Government introduced the 10p tax band, which was raised above the rate of inflation in the last Budget, taking another 3 million pensioners out of tax. I have already explained to the House that we are increasing the age-related personal allowances, and, next year, bringing in the pension credit to reward low-income pensioners. We are maximising the incomes of pensioners, particularly those on low incomes. Unlike the Conservative party, the Government are putting the abolition of pensioner poverty at the forefront of our efforts to increase pensioner incomes.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is widespread confusion among pensioners and the rest of us, who will be pensioners one day, about how pensions are paid for? I refer, for example, to the deferred taxation on pension contributions and the working of the pension tax credit. Will she run a public education campaign designed to inform not only current but future pensioners about the

financing and taxing of pensions so that people can plan properly for their future, which many currently do not do?

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. At the moment, the complexity of the pension regime—not just in the rules for operation of pension funds but in the taxation system—makes it extremely difficult for low-income people to access financial advice, and even for those who can access financial advice to be fully aware of their opportunities and obligations in the future. We are determined to simplify the system to maximise the information available to individuals and employers to exercise their responsibilities. That is why we shall publish later this year a Green Paper that will open up broad discussion about how people can achieve a secure and adequate retirement income. That is also why, in that Green Paper, we will report on the three reviews that we have commissioned: the Ron Sandler review, which looks at the role of saving in general; the Pickering review from the Department for Work and Pensions, which looks at pension simplification and the rules attached to that; and the review of pension taxation that has been undertaken by the Inland Revenue.

Small Businesses

13. **Gregory Barker** (Bexhill and Battle): What recent representations he has received on how his policies are affecting small businesses; and if he will make a statement. [78236]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The Chancellor regularly meets small business leaders and receives a large number of written representations on small business concerns.

Gregory Barker: Can the Economic Secretary tell the House what are the latest indicators for business start-ups in the United Kingdom?

John Healey: We have published this week the latest figures for business start-ups, nationally and in every part of the country. If the hon. Gentleman wants to complete the briefing that he normally uses, may I also point him to independent international studies that consistently show that the UK now has one of the most enterprise-friendly environments in the world and one of the best business tax regimes in the European Union? As Minister with responsibilities for Customs, may I also point him to some of the measures introduced recently in my area to relieve the costs in time and money for small businesses in complying with taxation legislation and responsibilities?

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Is my hon. Friend aware that small businesses in my constituency are very supportive of the moves that have been made in recent years to increase the science and technology budgets and the innovation budgets? If he would like to consider how that has affected small business in practice, I would encourage him to visit some of the small manufacturing companies in my constituency, especially those doing innovative work with digital printing, which have a great future in front of them.

John Healey: I am grateful for the welcome that small companies in my hon. Friend's area have given, particularly to the new measures that the Government have put in place to support long-term investment in research and development and science and technology. That will be a crucial part of meeting the productivity gap and the challenge that the UK faces to close the gap with our competitor countries and to ensure that small business start-up rates, not just in my hon. Friend's constituency but across the country, are boosted, so that the survival rates of those small firms are boosted, too. I welcome her kind invitation to visit firms in her constituency, and I shall consult my diary manager on possible dates.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Given that the Institute of Directors has recently calculated that the annual cost of employment regulations has risen by £6 billion during the last five years, what is the Economic Secretary's response to small businesses in my constituency that say that it is becoming increasingly difficult to do business and that they are having to move their manufacturing base abroad?

John Healey: The real cost of administering employment and other regulations is a fraction of the figure that the hon. Gentleman cites. We are ready to have a serious debate about regulation, but that debate must be based on fact and not on rhetoric. We have demonstrated since 1997 that we are ready to cut regulation when there is a good case for that. For example, we have raised the threshold for statutory audit, saving small companies £180 million a year, and we have cut and simplified the regulations on the minimum wage, saving small firms £100 million a year.

However, the reality is that there is an important role for regulation. It is part of ensuring that this country has fair competition and fair protection for employees. I take it from what the hon. Gentleman said that he is against the national minimum wage, against paid holidays and against the right for people to attend to family crises. However, provisions for all that have been introduced under this Government.

Iraq (Security Council Resolution)

12.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about negotiations on a new United Nations Security Council resolution in respect of Iraq.

A revised draft resolution was circulated to all members of the UN Security Council yesterday. The council is now discussing the text and will vote on it shortly. A vote could come as early as tomorrow night. As we will prorogue later today, I wanted to update the House now as the negotiations are entering their final stage. I have placed a copy of the joint United Kingdom-United States draft in the Libraries of both Houses.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reminded the House yesterday, our overriding objective is to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction through an effective inspections regime. The Prime Minister and I have made the case for UN action here in the House, to our allies and to the wider world. On 10 September, my right hon. Friend told the Trades Union Congress conference that the UN had to be the means of dealing with this problem, not of avoiding it. Two days later, President Bush, in his historic speech to the General Assembly, said that the UN had either to enforce the writ of its own resolutions or risk becoming irrelevant. On 14 September, in the same forum, I called on the UN to meet the challenge posed by Iraq and to defend its own authority.

As one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, the UK has been determined to ensure that the UN emerges from this crisis with its credibility enhanced. During the negotiations, our aim has been to secure consensus on a tough resolution that leaves Iraq under no illusions about the need for disarmament. The text currently before the Security Council is the product of eight weeks of intensive negotiations. The United Kingdom and the United States began to circulate elements of a draft resolution to fellow Security Council members on 25 September, and a draft full text on 23 October.

Throughout these two months, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has spoken to President Bush and other Heads of Government at regular intervals. I have been in daily contact with the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and I have had detailed discussions on numerous occasions with my French, Russian and Chinese counterparts and with Foreign Ministers of the elected 10 of the Security Council. Our UN ambassador, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, and his team have worked tirelessly in New York.

The draft resolution uses the full powers of the UN under chapter 7 of its charter. The architecture of the draft has been extensively discussed between the permanent members, and I would like now to set out for the House the key points.

First, the text makes it clear in operative paragraph 1 that Iraq has been and remains in material breach of its obligations under previous Security Council resolutions. Secondly, in operative paragraph 2, the text affords Iraq a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations. Thirdly, it stipulates that false statements or omissions in Iraq's declaration of its weapons of mass destruction holdings and failure by Iraq to comply with the resolution shall constitute a further material breach of Iraq's obligations, and provides that this will be reported to the council for assessment. Fourthly, the text gives significantly enhanced powers to the United Nations Monitoring Verification and Inspection Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency to conduct effective, intrusive inspections.

Right hon. and hon. Members may be surprised by the level of detail in the resolution, but our experience with Saddam Hussein has made that necessary. I draw particular attention to the following aspects of the resolution: the provision for conducting interviews with Iraqi citizens inside or outside Iraq, without the presence of Iraqi Government minders; the explicit setting aside of previous arrangements that restricted inspectors' access to so-called presidential sites; provisions for freezing a site to be inspected so that nothing is changed within it nor taken from it while it is being inspected; and making legally binding the "practical arrangements" set out by the inspectors themselves and covering issues such as regional bases, the right to encrypted communications, and so on. In sum, it is a basis for an inspection regime designed not to go through the motions, but to achieve disarmament.

The text sets out the procedure to be followed in the case of failure by Iraq to comply: it requires in operative paragraph 4 that any further material breach of Iraq's obligations should be reported to the Security Council. It directs in operative paragraph 11 the executive chairman of UNMOVIC and the director general of the IAEA to report immediately to the council any interference by Iraq with their inspection activities or failure to comply with its disarmament obligations. It provides in operative paragraph 12 that the council will convene immediately on receipt of a report of non-compliance in order to consider the situation.

On timing, the text provides that within seven days of adoption of the resolution Iraq must confirm its intention fully to comply; that within 30 days Iraq must submit a full and accurate declaration of all aspects of its WMD programmes; that within 45 days inspections should resume; and that within 105 days of the passing of the resolution UNMOVIC and IAEA should report to the Security Council. The text concludes by underlining that Iraq has been repeatedly warned that it will face serious consequences as a result of continuous violations of its obligations.

I emphasise again that the detailed wording may change further in negotiation; discussions will resume this afternoon in New York. However, this draft resolution meets the United Kingdom's objectives. It takes into account many points raised in the Security Council by other member states and by the chief inspectors, Mr. Blix and Mr. El Baradei. We are now seeking unanimous support for the resolution in order to send the strongest message to Saddam Hussein.

Britain wants a peaceful resolution to this crisis, and the United States has shown by its engagement in the long negotiations over past weeks that it too is committed to using the UN route in order to resolve this problem. At this point, I should like to pay my own

tribute to President Bush and to United States Secretary of State Powell for their great patience and great statesmanship.

History tells us that if diplomacy is to succeed it must be combined with the credible threat of force. As Kofi Annan has said, with direct reference to Iraq:

"We have learned that sensitive diplomacy must be backed by the threat of military force if it is to succeed."

It is that threat which, in recent weeks, has forced Saddam to concede the prospect of readmitting weapons inspectors. The more credible the threat, the more likely it is that Iraq will respond to the demands of the UN.

As the negotiations at the Security Council enter their final stage, we are approaching a critical moment for the whole of the international community and for the integrity of our system of international law. By adopting the resolution, the Security Council will send the clearest possible signal of its determination to uphold the authority of the United Nations, and we will be one step closer to resolving a problem that has undermined the security of Iraq's neighbours, and the wider world, for more than a decade. The task of the inspectors is to find and to destroy the weapons of mass destruction. The choice for Saddam Hussein is to comply with the UN or face the serious consequences.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement and for giving me sight of it in advance.

We congratulate the United States and United Kingdom Governments on the resolution, and I recognise the Foreign Secretary's contribution to it. We hope it will secure the support of the Security Council and not be vetoed by any permanent member. This is a test of the determination of the United Nations to deal with the threat of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of unstable, undemocratic, despotic and aggressive regimes. If the resolution were to fall because of the veto of permanent members with political or commercial interests in so vetoing it, the integrity of the United Nations would be seriously damaged.

The resolution sets out clearly the requirements that Saddam Hussein must fulfil if he is to rectify what the resolution describes as the

"material breach of its obligations under relevant Resolutions".

Those resolutions, which together would achieve the central objective of the elimination of his weapons of mass destruction, are already in place. The resolution stipulates the timetables within which the various requirements must be met and rightly indicates serious consequences for non-compliance. We also strongly welcome the commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq.

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the resolution must leave no room for doubt or manoeuvring in the mind of Saddam Hussein? There are a number of matters on which the resolution could be still clearer, which I hope he will clarify. Do the words in paragraph 2—

"a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations"—

mean that in the event of non-compliance no further resolutions will required before appropriate action can be taken? Is it implicit in the resolution that action is already justified by the existing and continuing material breach of Iraq's obligations? What happens if, after seven days, Saddam Hussein has not unambiguously confirmed his intention to comply with the resolution? That does not seem to be covered in paragraph 12.

Who judges under paragraph 3 whether any disclosure of weapons and missiles is full and final given that previous disclosures by Iraq have subsequently been admitted to have been inaccurate? What account has been taken of the use of the past eight weeks by Saddam Hussein to hide his weapons of mass destruction, which was alluded to in the dossier published in September, and what measures are being taken to counter that? What happens if, after the 105 days to which the Foreign Secretary referred in paragraph 5, no weapons of mass destruction have been found but there remain indications that they exist?

Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the reference in paragraph 12 to restoring "international peace and security" must be read in conjunction with article 42 of chapter VII of the United Nations charter, which states:

"action can be taken by air, sea or land forces as may be necessary to . . . restore international peace and security"?

What will the Government do if the resolution is vetoed? What preparations is the right hon. Gentleman making to have a full debate on the subject in Government time when the House returns?

The message of resolution and, I hope, the message of the House to Saddam Hussein must quite simply be:

"Your weapons of mass destruction must go. You can do it yourself or it will be done for you."

Mr. Straw: May I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his generosity in what he said about the work done in the United States and here, including by me?

The right hon. Gentleman asked about a veto. We are not anticipating a veto of the resolution, and I do not want to anticipate that. Nothing is certain until the matter is put to a vote, but we have worked hard over the past eight weeks to bring our colleagues in the P5 and the elected 10 to a clear consensus not on a mushy resolution, but on a clear-cut resolution that sets out the clearest possible obligations on Saddam Hussein. Every Foreign Minister to whom I have spoken in the past eight weeks agrees that the best chance of resolving Saddam Hussein's defiance of the international community lies in the international community showing the greatest degree of unanimity—and toughness.

The right hon. Gentleman asks a series of questions about the "final opportunity" mentioned in operative paragraph 2. The draft resolution is structured to tell Saddam Hussein, in operative paragraph 1, that

"Iraq has been and remains in material breach";

operative paragraph 2 states that this is "a final opportunity"; operative paragraphs 3 to 10 set out how Iraq has to fulfil what is described euphemistically as an

"opportunity to comply with its . . . obligations";

under operative paragraph 11, the inspectors are under a duty to report to the Security Council if they come across any breach; and under operative paragraphs 4 and 11, the Security Council can—and will—resume its meetings to consider the circumstances if there is a breach.

[Mr. Straw]

I do not want to anticipate what will happen if there is a breach, except to say that although we would much prefer decisions to be taken within the Security Council, we have always made it clear that within international law we have to reserve our right to take military action, if that is required, within the existing charter and the existing body of UN Security Council resolutions, if, for example, a subsequent resolution were to be vetoed. However, I do not believe that it will come to that.

The right hon. Gentleman asks about the 105 days. There is a clear requirement on the inspectors to report within 105 days, but that, as Sir Jeremy Greenstock made clear yesterday, does not mean that the inspections end when the 105 days have elapsed.

The right hon. Gentleman asks about article 42 of the UN charter. The whole resolution, if it is passed, has to be read against the background of the UN charter.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman asks whether I am making arrangements for a full debate in Government time. The answer is yes, and we hope that it will be on a substantive motion.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): May I offer apologies on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell)? He had an unavoidable appointment in Scotland today.

I welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement about a debate on a substantive motion, which would lead to a vote in the House of Commons on this matter.

I welcome the progress that the Foreign Secretary and British officials have made on the resolution. I share the hope for a successful outcome leading to inspection getting under way with the clear intention of removing Iraq's programme for weapons of mass destruction.

Recognising that it was Kofi Annan who referred to the threat of force being essential to the success of diplomacy, which we know to be true in the case of Saddam Hussein, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Security Council remains central to the consideration of whether the use of force is required; and that the inspectors and, indeed, interested states are required to report any breaches by Iraq to the Security Council for its consideration?

Although it is welcome that US spokesmen appear in the past few days to have backed away from the idea that regime change can be the objective of or justification for military action, does the Foreign Secretary recognise that there is still widespread anxiety across a broad range of opinion in this country that, fortified by the Republicans' electoral success, those elements in the US Administration who favour unilateral action may again come to the fore? Will he maintain Britain's commitment to an approach that has UN Security Council backing and the best prospects of securing continued international support?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks.

The United Nations remains central to consideration of this issue. We have been working hard to ensure that the UN stays involved and enhances its credibility and effectiveness. I repeat: any decisions that we make in respect of military action will be made within the context of the body of international law, of which Security Council resolutions form a part, but not the whole.

The resolution does not deal with regime change: it deals with Saddam Hussein's flouting of Iraq's obligations in respect of its weapons of mass destruction. However, we need to be aware that the Iraqi regime is one of the most revolting regimes in the world.

Mr. Beith: That is not justification for military action.

Mr. Straw: It is one of the most revolting regimes in the world. I look forward to the international community being more effective than it has been in, for example, dealing with the flagrant violation of human rights within Iraq, which has been going on for the past 12 years.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): At the risk of being seen as sycophantic, which I am not, may I express my delight and relief that the United States has been prepared to persevere through the Security Council route, which may minimise the risk of a military solution?

I ask my right hon. Friend to give us a little more information about what he thinks the phrase "serious consequences" may be. Has that been discussed? Is there some form of continuum of potential serious consequences that may run from a slap on the wrist, to a fine or military action?

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend should not worry about being sycophantic for a second. It is a perfectly honourable position to adopt.

I know that there is some scepticism about this among some of my right hon. and hon. Friends, but it is right to applaud the work of President Bush and his colleagues in the US Administration. They had the power to go down the unilateralist route, and there was nothing that the international community could have done about that. They made a choice to stick with the multilateralist UN route, and we should applaud them for that and for what President Bush has done to enhance the system. As for my hon. Friend's specific question, "serious consequences" means serious consequences up to and including military force.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): The Foreign Secretary has brought us welcome news, but I think the House should face the high probability that military action will be needed to enforce the resolution. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that those who oppose military action should recognise that the risks of doing nothing in these circumstances probably outweigh the risks of doing something? However, there are risks involved in military action of exacerbating the terrorist threat that we face. It seems to me that there are two things that we could do to reduce that threat. One is to put renewed efforts behind getting a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. I realise that Israeli politics make that difficult but we need to be seen to be doing more. Secondly, whatever interim Government are imposed on Iraq after military action is taken should be not just a western Government but should involve as wide an international coalition as possible.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman speaks with great wisdom. The resolution is good news but I emphasise

that it has not yet been passed. I am making a statement today rather than after the Security Council resolution has been passed because the House will be prorogued and there will not be another opportunity this Session.

As for military action, we are working on the basis that the resolution will prove effective. I have always said that the best chance of a peaceful solution to the crisis is through unanimity of the international community and a clear and credible threat of force if there is not compliance. Of course we must plan for the possibility of military action, but I remain quite optimistic that if we get unanimity, or near unanimity, the process can work. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need to push forward with the middle east peace process.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I am absolutely delighted that the work of the Government whom I support has given the world at least an opportunity to remove peacefully what I regard as a serious threat. However, for the avoidance of doubt, will my right hon. Friend assure me that under paragraph 3 Saddam Hussein is required to make a complete disclosure? If, subsequently, inspectors prove that he lies in making that disclosure, will that be taken as indicating serious intent to deceive the international community, requiring further action?

Mr. Straw: The simple answer is yes. The words mean what they say.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I join the Foreign Secretary in his warm remarks about the United States Administration. I hope that the United Kingdom Government will continue to act constructively with the United States irrespective of the criticism that they may receive from those on the Government Back Benches. I have not yet seen the text. Does it define precisely what is meant by "material breach"? Who, in the event of a discussion about what is or is not a material breach, will have the final say?

Mr. Straw: The text does not define "material breach", because it is a term of art familiar in international law, equivalent to the breach of a fundamental term, which the hon. and learned Gentleman and I are familiar with from English law of contract. It amounts to what it says: a material breach. There has been some discussion about who is to decide. It will become patent whether there has been a material breach, and what follows will in the first instance be a matter for discussion inside the Security Council.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I welcome the fact that Saddam Hussein is being given a final chance to disarm through the United Nations route. Will my right hon. Friend consider the situation facing the Iraqi people? No one has done more than Saddam Hussein to visit misery upon misery on them. Will the Foreign Secretary comment on reports that the resolution holds out some prospect that sanctions might eventually be removed? Under what circumstances might that happen?

Mr. Straw: Of course we have very great concern for the plight of the Iraqi people—a concern not shared by Saddam Hussein. Millions of people are in poverty and worse as a result of his totalitarian, fascist dictatorship. As my hon. Friend suggests, the resolution provides the last best hope of a peaceful solution. The position on sanctions remains as in UNSCR 1284, which sets out procedures for the lifting of sanctions and the resumption of normal commercial and social relations, provided that Saddam Hussein complies with all his obligations under Security Council resolutions. It is very simple. It remains to be seen whether he will accept those obligations.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I, too, congratulate the Government and the American Government on the work that they have done on the resolution. Will the Foreign Secretary be clear about the process? If Iraq is in material breach of the resolution, will UN-authorised military action require a new resolution?

Mr. Straw: The processes set out in the resolution are complicated, because this is a complicated matter and we have had to try to nail down all kinds of possibilities of what the Iraqi regime might do, bearing in mind how it has twisted and wriggled out of its obligations in the past. False statements or omissions or failure to comply, as set out in operative paragraph 4, will amount to a material breach, and any reporting by the inspectors may turn out to show a material breach. Then, under operative paragraph 12, the Security Council will meet to discuss the matter. Any member of the Security Council can table a resolution, and it remains to be seen whether the Security Council or individual members judge that a further resolution is necessary to deal with the material breach that is presented to them. It is complicated, but it is clear.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend, the Government and the American Government on providing a realistic prospect of a tough Security Council resolution being passed in the near future. Will he confirm that the time for Saddam Hussein to play games is now rapidly running out?

Mr. Straw: Yes, time is running out. If the resolution is passed unanimously, there will be clear deadlines for compliance, and that will serve the interests of the Iraqi people, as much as those of the security of the international community.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the issue that previously divided the United States from other members of the Security Council and the UK Government from many Members of Parliament is whether action in the name of the United Nations can be explicitly sanctioned by the Security Council alone? Will he tell us, clearly and unambiguously, whether the proposed resolution is a mandate for weapons inspections and a report back to the Security Council on non-compliance, or whether it is in itself a mandate for war—and does the American Administration share his interpretation?

Mr. Straw: I ask the hon. Gentleman to read through the resolution. We have always made it clear that any action that we take will be taken within the context of

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each of our obligations in international law, and the same applies to the United Nations. That remains the position. I have already said to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that the Security Council resolutions form part of international law but not the total corpus, and whether military action is justified in international law, with or without a second resolution, depends on the circumstances. I cannot predict those circumstances; moreover, I do not particularly want to, because what I want to see is a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The best way of getting such a peaceful resolution is, yes, by threatening force—we have to, because of the nature of Saddam Hussein—but also by backing that threat of force with a credible effective weapons inspection regime of the kind laid down in the draft resolution. If we do those two things, as we in the United Kingdom and the United States Government have been doing, we can have a peaceful outcome to the crisis.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): It is clear to many commentators, and I too believe it, that this is a war resolution. The United States, with the help of our Government, shamefully, appears to have bullied and intimidated people into coming on line, and, perhaps, also promised the spoils of war—oil. The resolution is mined with trip wires to trigger a war. It should be named after the film "Wag the Dog", because if Iraq does not trip up soon, I am pretty certain that the United States will make sure that it does.

I have two questions for when we go to war. First, can we have an absolute assurance that our Government will have nothing to do with the use of nuclear weapons, bunker busters or depleted uranium? Secondly, can we be told the truth about civilian casualties this time? Whenever there is a statement on Afghanistan, nobody in the Government seems willing to tell us how many civilians have died there.

Mr. Straw: I am sorry that my hon. Friend takes that view, and I have to say that I profoundly disagree with everything she has said. The very intensive discussions that I have been involved in over the past eight weeks with Foreign Ministers and Governments—those of Mauritius, Cameroon, Ireland, Syria, Mexico, Norway, Bulgaria, Singapore, Colombia and Guinea, as well as those of the Russian Federation, France, China and the United States—are not discussions between people who are not equal. The P5 and the elected 10 are all equals, because we have a similar vote within the Security Council. It strains credibility to suggest that if there is, as I hope there will be, a 14:1 or 15:0 vote on the resolution, it has come about only because of bullying. That is not the case. The reason why it has come about—or rather, will have come about, if it does—and the reason why there is now a great emerging consensus, is that everybody in the civilised world recognises that Saddam Hussein has been in the most terrible breach of international obligations under Security Council resolutions, and that the time has come to require that awful, terrible regime to put right those breaches of obligations. Sadly, we have to do so by threatening force, but backing it in this way with such an inspection system. There are no trip wires in the resolution; we have been extremely careful to ensure that there is none. For example, it gives realistic time scales. If he wishes, Saddam Hussein can comply with every dot and comma of it. It is what it says it is: a final opportunity.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Will the Foreign Secretary give an assurance that in the event of non-compliance by Iraq with the terms of the resolution, and the future commencement of large-scale military operations, the Government will at that point come to the House and make it clear whether the objective of those operations is disarmament alone or disarmament plus regime change?

Mr. Straw: I shall not speculate about the circumstances in which military action may or may not operate, but I will tell the right hon. Gentleman, as I said in my statement, that there will be the fullest possible discussion in the House as things develop. For example, I am arranging with my right hon. Friends the Chief Whip and the Leader of the House for an early debate on the substantive resolution so that the House has a full opportunity to debate the matter.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the remarks of Tim Trevan, the former United Nations inspector, who referred to Saddam's consistent policy of "cheat and retreat"? Does he agree that the real crunch point is likely to come not now or even before Christmas, but some time in the spring of next year, if the Saddam regime—as has always been the case—carries out a policy of lying and misleading, and cheating on its obligations? Can my right hon. Friend be sure that the international inspectors will be given the fullest possible support, so that they can really reveal what is going on in Iraq?

Mr. Straw: I do not think that we can yet be sure of anything so far as Saddam Hussein is concerned. We work on the basis that this man is a liar and a cheat. We spent a long time drafting the resolution to ensure that it covers every possibility that we can conceive of; and that is why, annexed to the resolution but being made into Security Council law, is a very detailed letter from Mr. Blix and Mr. El Baradei to the Iraqi regime, setting out further very important conditions on the operation of the inspection regime. We cannot be sure that Iraq will comply—it is in its interests to do so—but we can be sure that if it fails to do so, it will be in material breach. That will then be reported to the Security Council, and serious consequences will follow.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I am not sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) got a full answer to his question, so perhaps I might try to put it this way. If Saddam complies in full with this resolution and remains in power, will that, in the Government's view, constitute regime change?

Mr. Straw: Well, if he is still there, it will not constitute regime change.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): In the event of Saddam Hussein's failing to meet the terms of this resolution, do the British Government intend to table a resolution to the United Nations, seeking its support for

the use of force, whether or not that resolution will be supported by the Security Council? Furthermore, will he confirm that the draft resolution will not anticipate a carte blanche for British troops to intervene in Iraq without the obtaining of further permission from the House?

Mr. Straw: I have already sought to explain to Members how the procedure set out in the resolution would operate. If there is a further material breach, meetings of the Security Council will be called, and there will be discussions. It is open to any member of the Security Council—including, obviously, the United Kingdom—to put forward a resolution or resolutions about the circumstances that will then obtain. We of course reserve the right to do so, but I cannot at this stage anticipate what could happen in a series of hypothetical situations. I have already given undertakings on the issue of matters being debated, discussed and determined by this House. I am strongly in favour of this House playing a full role whenever the issue arises of military action being taken by forces on behalf of this country.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): Like others, I warmly welcome the progress made by the United Nations towards achieving compliance. The Foreign Secretary talked about the need to progress the middle east peace process, which is clearly essential. The Prime Minister proposed the setting up of a new conference on that process, but little progress seems to have been made. In the light of the imminent election in Israel and the possibility of an even more right wing Israeli Prime Minister, does the Foreign Secretary see matters progressing beyond mere words? Such developments are essential to getting the process moving.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious and important issue. As I said in response to an earlier question, we have to push forward with the middle east process with even greater firmness and determination precisely because of the situation with Iraq. We must not allow it to hold us back. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the various obstacles. Intensive discussions have taken place between the quartet—the United Nations, the Russian Federation, the United States and the European Union—about the so-called road map. I gave an interim progress report during Foreign Office questions on Tuesday. I am hoping for progress, not least now that there is some political space in the United States.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): A few minutes ago the Foreign Secretary said that, internationally, we are all equal. I do not doubt, however, that some are more equal than others. Given the atrocious nature of the regime in Baghdad—but also given what many believe to be the incontrovertible fact that the United States Administration have browbeaten the United Nations in an unedifying spectacle, on the basis that might is right—can the Foreign Secretary explain to me and to people of a like mind how it serves our wider national interest to be associated with such diplomatic tactics?

Mr. Straw: I cannot offer my hon. Friend an explanation because the assumption behind his question is simply untrue.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I welcome what the Foreign Secretary has said today, which underlines the tremendous skill shown by our diplomats in New York and elsewhere in working to achieve what he describes. I wish to underline a point that has been made only twice today so far. If international action follows, as I fear it will, the widest possible coalition of international support in the middle east should be sought, so that we receive, if not the active support, at least the passive acquiescence of those countries that will suffer most from the fallout of that action.

Mr. Straw: By the process of intensive discussion that has taken place over the past eight weeks—and through this whole calendar year—the United States and this country have shown that we fully recognise the need for a broad coalition of opinion behind such a use of the international community's power. That intent will continue.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I wish to build on the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), and remind the House that the Iraqi people would be the greatest beneficiaries from the removal of sanctions if Saddam Hussein complied with the resolution. If a time of crisis is a time of opportunity, is not this a great and unique opportunity for Saddam Hussein to return to the international community, to live by the rule of international law, to ease tension in the Gulf and to benefit his people by full compliance with the 17th United Nations resolution?

Mr. Straw: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will the Foreign Secretary accept that the motion before the United Nations is a considerable improvement on the previous motions, and that this process—in which he has played an important part—has been vital in obtaining a consensus internationally and among many who are concerned about the legality and the way in which any action might be viewed in future? Will he emphasise to the United Nations how important it is that the motion is not a compromise but something better? Will he also bring home to the United States the necessity of using the same efforts to solve the problems between Palestine and Israel at the same time?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. All of us who have been involved in the process are aware of the anxieties of the public, which I share—as do the Prime Minister and the United States—about the prospect of military action being used. Military action should never be used except as a last resort when all other possibilities have been exhausted. It should not be used because innocent people get killed in military action, because unintended

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consequences may occur and because we put the lives of our troops and the future of their families on the line. Those are serious responsibilities that we have to shoulder and ensure that they are reflected in our work. They have been so reflected here and, I believe strongly, in the United States. All my reading suggests that public opinion in the United States, and in the Administration, is no different in almost all particulars from that here or elsewhere.

As for the resolution of the Palestine-Israel question, I agree that that is viewed slightly differently across the Atlantic. As I have said, we must work closely with our American friends, as well as with those in the Russian Federation, the EU and the P5 group to secure justice for Israelis and Palestinians.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If Iraq fails to comply and military action—the most serious of consequences—ensues, would that require a mandate from the UN? Would this country support a coalition of nations undertaking that military action if such a mandate were not forthcoming? Under what legal verification would that be possible?

Mr. Straw: As I have said on a number of occasions in answer to questions, we would prefer to stay with the UN Security Council route. However, we must reserve the right, within our obligations under international law, to take military action if we deem that necessary, outwith a specific Security Council resolution being passed in the future.

I repeat that the UN charter, Security Council resolutions and customary international law are the basis of international law. They have to come together. Judgments about whether military action is necessary and justified in international law must be made on that totality.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): If Iraq fails to comply with the resolution and we then deem it necessary to take military action with our American allies, does the Foreign Secretary share my concern that public opinion in this country does not support that? That is especially true of people with previous military experience, despite the publication of the dossier by the Prime Minister last month. In those circumstances, I urge the Foreign Secretary to reveal further information that would satisfy the British people about the very real threat that Iraq poses, and about its close links with international terrorism. To date, he has failed to do that.

Mr. Straw: I do not accept the burden of the right. hon. Gentleman's question. The fairest thing to be said is that, although there is a wide spectrum of public opinion in this country, in Europe and in the US, there is no doubt that there is a much higher level of support for firm action within the UN route than outwith it. That is one of the many reasons why we have been determined, as far as humanly possible, to follow the UN route and to stay with it.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): The UN resolution is tough, and I hope that it will be adopted by the Security Council, but does my right hon. Friend accept the criticism that it should have been adopted after the liberation of Kuwait in 1991? If that had happened, the matter would have been resolved one way or the other.

We all hope that military action can be avoided. However, if it cannot be avoided, and action is taken, will it be made absolutely clear that there will be no foreign occupation of Iraq? There have been stories in the press and elsewhere to the effect that the US would remain in occupation for some years. That would be unacceptable to the international community, and especially to the Arab world. Will my right hon. Friend clear that matter up now?

Mr. Straw: I do not want to get drawn too far into hypothetical situations. We want the matter to be resolved peacefully. If the resolution is agreed by the UN, it will provide a means to resolve it peacefully, without any need to speculate about foreign occupation. If military action is taken, a range of possibilities will open up, but we would also seek to ensure that the government of Iraq was in better and more representative hands than at present. The history of countries all over the world, and not just in the Arab world, shows that Governments are better when they are run by the peoples of their countries, and not by dictators or foreign occupiers.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, whereas the plant needed to make nuclear weapons can be detected fairly easily by an efficient inspection regime, the plant required to make chemical and biological weapons is much more difficult to detect? Saddam Hussein has had since 1998 to build up stocks of chemical and biological weapons and even to dismantle the plant that produced them. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is a danger that it will be very difficult indeed for an inspection regime to discover those stocks, which could be hidden anywhere in the vast area that is Iraq? Is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that, even under the most rigorous inspection regime, we can have confidence that Saddam Hussein will not be able to maintain such stocks and, if he wishes, supply to them terrorist groups abroad?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the greater ease with which one can hide chemical and biological weapons and facilities for developing nuclear weapons. That is true and it has had to be factored in to the powers being given to the weapons inspectors. No one can guarantee what is going to happen now. We cannot predict the future. The powers that the resolution will give to the weapons inspectors are the toughest possible powers to secure the best outcome—we hope—but the resolution also requires compliance and co-operation by the Saddam Hussein regime. It needs to know that if it fails to comply with any of the particulars, it will be in material breach and serious consequences will follow.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I hope and pray that my right hon. Friend is right when he says that the draft resolution represents a genuine wish by the United States authorities to bring about effective weapons inspection by peaceful means. Will he give the House further details of the enhanced powers that the

resolution gives to UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency? Which provisions of resolution 1154 does the resolution override? Has the chief of the weapons inspectors requested that they should be accompanied by security guards? How many such guards would he expect to be dispatched and which countries are they likely to come from?

Mr. Straw: The third tiret of operational paragraph 7 overrides the provisions of resolution 1154 in respect of presidential sites. The fifth tiret states:

"Security of UNMOVIC and IAEA facilities shall be ensured by sufficient UN security guards".

They will come from a number of countries.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The Secretary of State will be aware that discussions on the resolution are taking place against the background of increasing reports of international terrorist threats. Is he aware of any indicators that suggest that there are links between Saddam Hussein's regime and those threats? I do not expect him to be able to give details of the intelligence that he might have, but are there any indications of a linkage?

Mr. Straw: There is clear evidence of linkage between the Iraqi regime and terrorist organisations of a very pernicious kind operating in Israel and the occupied territories. I have seen no evidence to link the Iraqi regime to al-Qaeda in respect of what happened before 11 September, but as I told the House on Tuesday, if such evidence is produced I would not be surprised.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I recognise the efforts that my right hon. Friend has made to bring about an acceptable wording for the resolution. We all hope that it will avoid war. What progress has he made on another matter that I have raised many times in the Chamber—using international law and calling on the United Nations to set up a war crimes tribunal on Iraq, which would be the best way to bring about a regime change without military action? What progress is he making in indicting leading members of the regime, using international law, which can be used in this country, for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide?

Mr. Straw: I thank my hon. Friend for her generous remarks and place on record my admiration for her work for the Kurdish people and the other oppressed peoples of Iraq. She has undertaken that work at times when it has not been popular as well as when it has become more noteworthy.

We have been making as much effort as we can in respect of indicting the war criminals in Iraq. I recognise my hon. Friend's feeling that that is not sufficient and I will continue to pursue indictment in the United Kingdom. As she knows, I speak to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General about this from time to time. I shall be seeing him again this afternoon for a further discussion. We certainly do not rule out an international tribunal trying Saddam Hussein and others in his Government for war crimes.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): As welcome as this resolution will be, we all nevertheless recognise that its time scale moves us closer to the possibility of conflict. In the light of a possible large-scale conflict in the middle east, can the Foreign Secretary tell the House what Government and cross-departmental contingency plans have been made to deal with the huge humanitarian disaster that could follow as a result of an exodus from the conflict zone?

Mr. Straw: I do not believe that if the resolution is passed it will advance the prospect of war. I think that the prospect of military action will recede. I have always been clear about that. We cannot put a mathematical number on the possibilities, but I have always been clear that the more unanimous we are in the international community and the tougher we are at first, the less likelihood there is of us having to use military action, but we may have to use it.

All sorts of contingency plans are of course being prepared.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): What are they?

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that I am going to disclose these to the House, and therefore to Saddam Hussein, he needs to think again.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): What will my right hon. Friend say to the hundreds of my constituents who have written to me because they are concerned that the United States and the United Kingdom are hell bent on war, whatever the actions of the Iraqi leader? Can he give me an assurance that, should Saddam Hussein fully comply with the UN resolution, there will be no military conflict?

Mr. Straw: The answer to my hon. Friend's second question is that I do not anticipate any circumstances in which there would be military action in which we would participate regarding Saddam Hussein's defiance of his obligations under United Nations Security Council resolutions if he suddenly decided to comply. Operative paragraph 2 spells out very clearly that this is a final opportunity for Saddam to comply.

Of course I understand the anxieties of my hon. Friend's constituents. We all share them. They believed that the United States and the United Kingdom would go it alone to be unilateral. That has not happened, and now that we have chosen to use the United Nations route—I hope successfully—those who have been calling for it must not now call for something different. I am afraid that one or two colleagues in the House—not my hon. Friend—are changing their tune because the first one has not worked.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing the resolution. In the debate held during the recall of Parliament, I said that I would find it difficult to imagine a resolution that would be so specific. As an avid reader of UN resolutions, I have never read one as specific as this, and I hope that it goes through in its entirety in New York.

I agree with right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who have reminded my right hon. Friend of the need to reassure people in the middle east

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that not only are we determined to be firm about this but to set a road map and resolve the Israel-Palestine question as speedily as possible.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. He has already heard what I said about the middle east, and I share his opinion on that. The UN resolution is very specific—that is one reason why it has taken such intensive discussions to negotiate. However, we are not there yet. We hope to be, but we have to get the other 14 members of the Security Council to vote for it.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that all the work that he and Government colleagues have done over the past many weeks and months has been in the interests of international peace and law, and that it has not been a question of the countries of the west getting their hands on Iraq's oil? Will he also confirm that the action being taken at the United Nations could strengthen its authority and standing? Does he hope that other countries in the middle east that are in breach of UN resolutions will take careful note of the work that has been done to achieve compliance with these resolutions?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. The issue was the authority of the United Nations and thus the authority of the whole international community. We want Saddam Hussein's compliance with this resolution. We also want compliance with all UN Security Council resolutions. By definition, the United Kingdom, as a permanent member with a veto, has always supported, or at least not opposed, those resolutions, although we have particular responsibilities to see that they are subject to full compliance.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on their work in bringing about this multilateral UN approach, which many people would not have thought possible a few months ago. It will come as a huge relief to my constituents, who all express the view not only that this is a last chance for peace but that it affects the credibility of the United Nations.

In respect of that credibility, although I realise that my right hon. Friend does not want to anticipate a situation whereby there has to be an immediate recall if there is action under paragraph 4, and bearing it in mind that in 1991 Saddam Hussein failed to declare any biological weapons, will my right hon. Friend comment in general terms on whether he thinks there is seriousness fully to support the disarmament work of the weapons inspectors rather than the ambivalence that was too often displayed by the Security Council between 1991 and 1998?

Mr. Straw: I hope and believe that there is that seriousness. Under the leadership provided by President Bush, the UN recognised that it faced a serious moment in its history, when its own credibility was at stake. My hon. Friend is right to refer to the fact that Saddam Hussein was able to play games with the international community because the international community was not united in its resolve to secure the disarmament of Iraq. I hope and believe that the new arrangements indicate a new approach by the international community, but we must ensure that all its members and the Security Council fully back the resolution if, as I hope, it is passed.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Although it was a long time ago, I lived in Iraq for two years, so I have great concern for the well-being of the Iraqi people. Is it not the case that, under Saddam Hussein's regime, the people of Iraq have suffered considerably—from the Iraq-Iran war, the Gulf war, economic sanctions, economic collapse, hyperinflation and Saddam Hussein's internal oppression? Should Anglo-American invasion or attack on Iraq be added to that devastating list?

Mr. Straw: I have already said that we do not want military action. I know of my hon. Friend's concern for the plight of the Iraqi people, but everything that he listed was caused by one man—Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): As someone who has expressed concern about Government policy, may I welcome the general terms of the resolution and, in particular, the provision that compliance should be determined by the inspectors and that non-compliance should be reported to the Security Council? Will my right hon. Friend recognise that for many of us it is vital that the appropriate response to any breach is decided by the United Nations and we rely on the Prime Minister's assurances that war will be regarded as a last resort?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks, which I greatly appreciate.

Yes, the Prime Minister was right when he said that we see the prospect of military action very much as a last resort. I repeat that if we can pass the resolution in its current form, or close to it, the prospect of military action will recede.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): May I take this first opportunity to thank personally my right hon. Friend and his Department for securing the release of my constituent, Peter Shaw, yesterday? We all hope that the resolution is passed and we understand what the phrase "serious consequences" means, but is my right hon. Friend confident that the Iraqis and the Arabic-speaking world know what it means?

Mr. Straw: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said about the work of our diplomats in London and in the region in securing Mr. Peter Shaw's release from the terrible incarceration that he has suffered and, through my hon. Friend, I should like to pass on to Mr. Shaw and his family my very good wishes. I heard him on the radio late last night, and he and his daughter were remarkably phlegmatic given the most appalling situation in which he had been.

As for Iraq, I do not think that Saddam Hussein has any doubt at all about the phrase "serious consequences"; he knows what it means. However, he faces a clear choice: whether to continue down the road of deception and double dealing, which is second nature

to him, or whether to recognise that the words in the resolution mean what they say. This is a final opportunity for Iraq to comply.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Does my right hon. Friend believe, as I do, that the resolution in its current form constitutes a test for the United Nations of its relevance in the 21st century?

Mr. Straw: Yes, it does. That is why we have said throughout that this is not just a matter of our showing faith in the UN; in turn, the UN has to take responsibility for such a flagrant breach of its own obligations.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Like all hon. Members, I hope that the UN will pass the resolution later today or tomorrow and that the Security Council will give it its full support. It is much more preferable that the will of the Prime Minister and people such as Colin Powell has prevailed in Washington, rather than that of people such as Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, who, at one time, seemed intent on our going to war straight away. Countries such as Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, will be very pleased that it seems as though things will be resolved peacefully through the UN.

Can my right hon. Friend tell us what will happen to the no-fly zones if everything goes ahead as the resolution indicates? What lessons will there be for the role of the UN in dealing with other hot spots? The middle east has already been mentioned, but what about the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the half dozen other nations involved in that struggle, very much to the detriment of their own peoples?

Mr. Straw: First, I hope that the resolution will be passed by tomorrow, but I would rather the vote were delayed if the result of that delay was that we gained unanimity or a larger vote. I would personally be very happy to wait until the beginning of next week if by doing so we get 14 or 15 signed up to the resolution rather than a lower number.

On the no-fly zones, decisions will have to be taken about them in the light of circumstances. Self-evidently, they operate not under this resolution but under previous resolutions, but neither we nor the United States have an interest in continuing to operate the no-fly zones longer than necessary.

On the DRC, my hon. Friend will know that a UN peacekeeping force—MONUC—is already there, and we want MONUC to have an enhanced role in the emerging peace process.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Although I acknowledge the work put into the resolution, are not the Russians right in saying that it still contains ambiguities? For example, would not inspection teams under the resolution be likely to be US-dominated? Why have UNMOVIC and the IAEA got the right to destroy any records at will? Why has Iraq got to justify everything that is not related to weapons production or materials? That could include any pharmacy shop. Why cannot the Secretary of State explicitly say that economic sanctions will be lifted if Iraq complies with the final UN resolution?

Mr. Straw: With great respect, on the last point, I have already said that resolution 1284 lays out the circumstances for lifting economic sanctions, which are not directly dealt with by this resolution. The sanctions could be lifted tomorrow by the Security Council if Saddam Hussein complied with his obligations; it is his failure to do so that causes the sanctions to continue. Moreover, let us be clear that it is not the economic sanctions that have plunged the Iraqi people into poverty but Saddam Hussein's decisions. He could feed every man, woman and child in Iraq today, under sanctions, if he chose to do so.

So far as the Russians are concerned, there has been a lengthy iterative process of discussion and negotiation with all five permanent members of the Security Council which has resulted in a meeting of minds with the Russian Federation and others. The Russians' view is a matter not for me but for President Putin and his Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov. A few issues remain to be discussed, but just before I came to the House I had a good conversation with Mr. Ivanov about aspects of the resolution, and I believe that these matters can and will be resolved.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): As it seems likely that, one way or the other, there will be regime change in Baghdad within six months or a year, do the Government have a clear view about whether the interests of Iraq's neighbours in ensuring the integrity of Iraq are more or less important than a possible conflict with the democratic wishes of the Iraqi people?

Mr. Straw: All the neighbours are clear about the importance of maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq. One of the preliminary paragraphs of the draft resolution reaffirms

"the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq, Kuwait and the neighbouring states".

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his work in bringing us to this point. Does he agree that the special status of this resolution under chapter VII of the United Nations charter, which deals with acts of aggression, puts special responsibility on the United Nations to secure its enforcement?

Mr. Straw: Yes, which is why I drew the attention of the House to the fact that this is a chapter VII resolution. That does not mean that other resolutions should not be enforced, but this resolution places categorical obligations on one member state. Other resolutions, such as 242 and 338, are more complex because they place obligations on a number of member states and on the Palestinian Authority, and we have therefore to enforce them through a different route.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I welcome the resolution, which offers us the best hope of achieving what we all want—a peaceful resolution of the crisis. I know that my right hon. Friend will accept, however, that while we all hope for the best, it is the Government's special responsibility to prepare for the worst. I know that he will pursue the United Nations route to the end, but he is right to emphasise that if it is not possible to resolve the crisis in that way, we must retain the right to act in the face of the threat posed by the Iraqi regime. Will he confirm that, in the future as now, it is in this country's

[Roger Casale]

best defence interests to have a strong multilateral, international system, but we will not achieve that by failing to stand up to dangerous, aggressive dictators such as Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Straw: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks, and I agree with every word.

Mr. Ancram: The Foreign Secretary will agree that it is important that we and our American allies interpret the resolution and its outcome in the same way. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) asked him whether he would regard full compliance as a regime change, and his answer was that if Saddam Hussein is still there, the regime has not changed. He may remember that yesterday Richard Armitage, the US Deputy Secretary of State, when asked the same question, said that if there were full compliance, the American Government would consider that the regime had changed. I hope that the Foreign Secretary is not trying to take a harder line than the American Government, and I offer him the chance to reconsider his answer.

Mr. Straw: Richard Armitage is a great man. I would not dream of disagreeing with him—no one who had seen his size would do so. This is a question of ambiguity, and an important issue is involved. There is an issue of regime change and of removing the current regime under Saddam Hussein from office. Is that the purpose of the resolution? No. It is not mentioned once in the resolution. As a matter of interpretation, if Saddam Hussein has his weapons of mass destruction removed, does that, in turn, change the nature of the regime? Yes.

Orders of the Day

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill

Consideration of Lords message.

Mr. Speaker: I draw the House's attention to the fact that a paper containing a Government motion to disagree and amendments in lieu is available in the Vote Office. I also remind the House that proceedings on the Lords message are limited to one hour.

Lords Amendment: 17B, in page 9, line 8, at end insert—

"( ) In determining the location of premises provided under this section the Secretary of State shall have regard to the needs of the persons to be accommodated therein."

1.46 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

I offer my thanks to Members on both sides of the House who have contributed to the debates and the improvements that have been made during the passage of the Bill through both Houses. It is a better Bill for the changes that have been made, and, on the whole, people have contributed very constructively to it. I do not pretend for a moment that I can satisfy every Hampstead liberal in every party, although I might go some way towards satisfying the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who was described by one of his former shadow Cabinet colleagues as a Hampstead liberal, which I am not sure was a term of endearment.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Shocking.

Mr. Blunkett: Absolutely. Terribly shocking. I also want to put on record my thanks to the Minister of State, my noble Friend Lord Filkin, and our Whips, advisers and officials for all their tremendous hard work.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I could do nothing else to a Hampstead liberal.

Glenda Jackson: I merely want to point out to my right hon. Friend that my constituents surely have a right to have their views expressed on the Floor of the House, regardless of whether they voted for me or any other political party, especially when their feelings with regard to the segregated education of asylum-seeking children are so deeply and passionately held.

Mr. Blunkett: I am absolutely clear that my hon. Friend has every right to express her view, to do so as vehemently as she did in the debate on Tuesday—to which I listened with considerable interest—to have it taken into account and to receive a response. I heard all sorts of adjectives such as "outrageous" and "abominable" that did not take us much further in

persuading each other of the case. Throughout the Bill, it is persuasion that has led me to make concessions on amendments that have improved the Bill.

Glenda Jackson: I accept my right hon. Friend's point with regard to persuasion, which is why many of my constituents are bemused that, on the issue to which I have referred, he seems not to have taken into consideration at all the opposition to segregated education from every teaching union and association that deals with the welfare of children and from many others.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The amendment under discussion relates to accommodation centres rather than education.

Mr. Blunkett: In dealing with the broad issue of accommodation centres, I will seek to deal with my hon. Friend's comments. Terminology that describes open centres as prisons has not exactly helped to persuade me that she and those of her constituents who have approached her have fully understood the nature of the centres that we are providing nor their comparators in some of the most liberal countries in the world, including Scandinavia. In the short time that I have available, I will seek to make a case in respect of the amendments in the context of the overall policy that we are trying to pursue. I want to put the issue in context so that the House and those outside understand what we are doing.

The Bill develops a careful balance between our human rights and convention obligations—which we accept readily and openly—and a streamlined and robust process to build trust with the British people. This balance entails the development of new routes of entry for economic migration, which we believe is necessary for our economy and welcome in terms of diversity and culture in Britain. In doing that, we have sought to deter those who use clandestine asylum processes to seek economic rather than refugee status. That is highly relevant to what we are doing today.

We have sought, and will put in place, a new gateway for those desperately seeking refugee status, and who live in circumstances and regions so poor that they are unable to pay organised criminal traffickers. Our proposal means that such people will be able to obtain refugee status in this country. The reality is that many—but not all—of the people trafficked across Europe into the United Kingdom come here only because they or their families have paid large sums of money to the worst kind of organised criminals who exploit the needs of the most deprived. However, the people who need refugee status most cannot get out of the circumstances in which they find themselves. At some point in the future, that may be the subject of a further debate—but I hope not legislation—in the House.

Above all, we accept what has been restated throughout our consideration of the Bill. There is a need dramatically to improve the performance of our immigration, nationality and asylum processes and the directorate that oversees them. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) has intervened on me twice, and I hope that she will accept that that was one of the central points that she made on Tuesday. I listened and I accept the point, because I believe that is relevant. All sides have said that it does not matter what legislation we put in place if we do not dramatically improve the administration of the system. Unless we do that, even our best intentions will come to nothing.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does my right hon. Friend recall that I have raised particular concerns about accommodation centres and the lack of control over those running them? One of my greatest fears is that the new isolated centres could be run by people who do not treat the people in them properly. Is he able to offer me any reassurance on that given my past experience in Liverpool?

Mr. Blunkett: I am offering that in terms of both the provision in the Bill for a monitor and the amendment that deals with the role of the monitor. There will also be direct accountability and oversight of the centres by Ministers in a way that has been difficult to achieve in the early stages of dispersal and in the appalling conditions—including in my hon. Friend's constituency in Liverpool—to which people have drawn attention. It is precisely because we wish to avoid a continuation of that situation that we want a system that is better, not worse. Here is the rub, and it is highlighted by an interesting debate—not a debate that I necessarily wish to enter into—that started in Birmingham yesterday. Interest was shown on the radio and in an interview this morning about the nature of what is happening in the inner cities where the largest number of asylum seekers are currently housed and where they seek services.

Let us take the issue of education in accommodation centres, for instance. The faster, more efficient, more improved the administration, the greater the speed with which those resident in accommodation centres will move through the process. If we were to achieve that in dispersal, alongside such improvement in accommodation centres, we would enormously increase the pressure on services—in respect of throughflow in GP practices or turnover—which already exercises the teaching unions and hon. Members, particularly in London, where population turnover is already very high and impacts on both children who are placed and those already there, and on the ability of teachers to do their jobs properly. As a trained teacher, I know that it is a fact that the greater the turnover, the greater the difficulty in managing stability, consistency and teaching of all children who require special attention.

So here is the paradox: the more efficient the system, the more we need accommodation centres. If the system were working as I wished, turnover in schools, GP practices and accommodation would be such that the logistics would be very difficult to manage and problems for pupils, asylum seekers and service providers would be very great.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): My right hon. Friend is making an important point. Does he recognise that, because rapid turnover makes it much more difficult to organise accommodation, teaching and so on, there are all sorts of understandable vested interests in ensuring that the system works as slowly as possible? That cannot be in the overall interests of the country or asylum seekers.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely. After some useful debates, we are getting to the nub of what we are trying

[Mr. Blunkett]

to do. The official Opposition want us to speed up the process through accommodation centres even further. I promise all hon. Members that we will do our best in trying to ensure that the administration responds and that there is proper accountability to us as Ministers and through us to Parliament. We will try to achieve the substantial improvement that one section of the immigration and nationality directorate has made in first decisions, for which I commend it.

In April 1997, it took an average of 20 months for a first decision to be made. In December last year, it took an average of 13 months. Now, three quarters of first decisions are made within two months: a dramatic improvement that we need to match in every part of the process.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The Home Secretary referred to the need for general improvement in the administration of the asylum and immigration system. What time scale has been envisaged and what targets are being set for such improvement?

Mr. Blunkett: This Bill sets in train the targets that we have set the service in respect of those going through accommodation centres. We have debated whether such targets should be two, four, six, nine or 12 months, and we have hit on and now agreed as part of the Bill—that part is not under debate this afternoon—the time scales on which I hope to be able to improve, accelerating the processes. I hope to be able to lay orders before Parliament for still further improvement.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Home Secretary is rightly talking about the improvements that have been made to the Bill. The final Division in the other place last night was on the education issue, and, as he knows, the Government's view in the end prevailed. Given that that is now fixed, will he clarify whether it will still be possible for the local education authority to have prior right to run the education service in the accommodation centre, which I know was always an option and was under consideration when I last spoke to his colleagues?

Mr. Blunkett *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have reminded hon. Members that the amendment deals with accommodation centres and their location, not education.

2 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I take your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker. I merely observe, however, that I would say "collaboratively" rather than "prior" given the fact that education authorities no longer run schools as they did 15 or 20 years ago. That is emblazoned on my heart because I dealt with it for four years before I took on this job.

We are dealing with end-to-end reform of the process once people reach our shores, from new induction centres through accommodation centres and, where appropriate, dispersal and reporting, to integration or speedy removal. The task is clear: to provide a fairer and more effective service. When people reach our shores, we must make it clear that we expect them to claim asylum at that point and port of entry unless they have a good reason for not doing so. Once they have claimed asylum, the new induction centres, which will be crucial to assessing their needs, will come into play. For the foreseeable future, the vast majority will continue to be in an improved dispersal system. Trial accommodation centres are a crucial part of the process. We intend to ensure that we learn the lessons rapidly. They offer an option, which we must explore, dramatically to speed up the process, and I think the Conservatives agree that that is the way to proceed.

I have tabled an amendment to enable the new independent monitor of accommodation centres to consider

"whether, in the case of any accommodation centre, its location prevents a need of its residents from being met."

In doing so, we emphasise the needs of the resident. We should not be diverted by the argument about whether all asylum seekers should be accommodated in urban locations. Indeed, it has been implied that that would be in the most deprived urban areas that have the space or the facilities. We reject that. There should be a plurality. It should not be a case of one or the other. We need an experimental approach when deciding on the most appropriate location. The emphasis is on whether a site meets a need of the individual.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): By implication, surely we are talking about a proposed location. The Government will not go to the expense of building an accommodation centre before they ask the independent monitor whether it meets the needs of asylum seekers. Clearly, the Government will have to ask the independent monitor to express that view on a proposed location before an accommodation centre is built. Otherwise, there will be considerable nugatory expenditure.

Mr. Blunkett: We want to ensure that we have thought the matter through and have an evidence-based approach. My hon. Friend the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration said on Tuesday that different needs will have to be met in different types of centre. Some centres will be appropriate for single individuals. Others will be designed to meet the needs of those from a particular region who have a particular language requirement. That will help us to deal with the adjudication process, which requires not only legal advice but interpretation of that advice. If an identified need cannot be met, the other parts of the process will kick into play. The measure is an addition, an underpinning and a reinforcement of the process with regard to, for instance, education, on which we said that a special or specific need might have to be met in a different way. We now accept that that might be dealt with in a broader context, with the monitor offering a view.

We have listened and we expect others—in particular, the other House—to listen to what we have said.

Mrs. Ellman: Will my right hon. Friend commit the Government to assessing in the experimentation that is now to go ahead the model proposed by the Refugee Council as one possible way in which to run the centres?

Mr. Blunkett: Some bodies, organisations and agencies have taken what they would regard as a

principled stand and they have opposed our proposals, full stop. Others—the Refugee Council is one of them—while disagreeing fundamentally with the Government have been prepared to engage in dialogue, which is a two-way process of listening and responding. We have responded: my hon. Friend the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration said on Tuesday that we were prepared to continue to work with the Refugee Council on the configuration of the smaller centre, and we will respond to its other ideas, not least core and cluster.

We are continuing that process of dialogue. I mention the Refugee Council in particular because it has had slightly more impact on us than others, not because it has been less vigorous, but because it has been more reasonable. When it has been given assurances, it has been prepared to accept them, and when an argument is put to it, it has been prepared to listen.

Let me conclude by making one thing absolutely clear, and I hope that those in the other House will hear my words: we are now at the last throw of the dice. I will make no more amendments to the Bill. I hope that the other House will allow us to pass the legislation and so enable us to do what we all want to do, which is to establish a more effective, reasonable, sensitive and sensible system in which the British people have trust and which people throughout the world will know offers them a better opportunity to come to this country legitimately, to work here legitimately, or to seek sanctuary here in a more effective fashion.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I echo the Home Secretary's thanks to my colleagues, my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) and my noble Friends Lord Kingsland and Baroness Anelay of St. Johns, for their splendid work on the Bill as it has proceeded through its parliamentary stages.

I thought that the Home Secretary made both an ingenious and an elegant little Third Reading speech, which skilfully avoided any direct reference to the matter in hand—the Government amendment. That is understandable, given that it would not have been conducive to his having a good morning were he to have admitted that it echoes extremely closely an amendment first suggested by my noble Friend Baroness Anelay on 10 October—at which time the Government denied that it was in any way possible to accommodate the problems of accommodation centres by doing what they now suggest should be done. However, it would be churlish of me not to welcome what the Government have done, because they have done what needs to be done.

The amendment creates an independent arbiter who will be required, as well as requested, to look into whether the place in which a particular accommodation centre is put is appropriate from the point of view of its residents. To make that judgment, the monitor will need to look both at the nature of what is being put in that place, and at the place in which it is being put. That was the intent of the original amendment, No. 17, and it is far from our intention to cavil at the replacement of one amendment proposed by Conservative Members in the Lords by an amendment that is, in effect, another of our amendments. It is an excellent result, which we welcome.

I have two observations and one request to make. The first observation is that amendment No. 37, which underlies the amendment that is before us, makes it clear that the

"Monitor shall report . . . at least once in each calendar year".

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), who has played so notable a part in our proceedings, asked the Home Secretary whether it would be the case that the monitor would report before the centres in question were established. That was for him a particularly important question because my hon. Friend represents one of the places where, at present, it is intended to establish one of the centres.

The Home Secretary gave one of the most masterly pieces of obfuscation as a reply that I have yet been privileged to hear, even from his mouth in this place. I do not think that I could have matched in any way the efforts that he made to avoid answering that question, but I can answer it for him. Unless the right hon. Gentleman intends—I am sure that he does not—to delay unreasonably the appointment of a monitor, it will be the case that a year from now the monitor will report on this issue. I will lay an extremely large wager that the accommodation centre in my hon. Friend's constituency will not have been built one year from now. I suspect that it will not have been given planning permission a year from now. I suspect that the monitor will have reported long before the centre is built. Therefore, the answer to my hon. Friend's question is yes. That does not require any obfuscation.

Secondly, so far as we can see, if the monitor is to report to Parliament as amendment No. 37 dictates specifically that he shall, the monitor will need to explain to Parliament what depositions he has sought and what depositions he has received from experts. That is necessary to avoid judicial review of his process. I am sure, therefore, that he will seek the views of the various groups that concern themselves with and have expertise in relation to the needs of those who are to be housed in accommodation centres. We know which groups these are because 10 of them wrote to the Home Secretary not long ago to make their views known on these matters. We can reasonably accurately predict what they will say to the monitor about the proposed large rural locations. The monitor will clearly need to take their views into account.

The monitor will obviously have to take into account what the Home Secretary says to him. None of us is in a position to determine what the monitor will take as his view in the light of the two sets of depositions from the Home Secretary and from other bodies. However, it seems likely that if the monitor concludes that the needs of those who are to be housed are not properly to be met in large rural accommodation centres, that will at least provide a prima facie basis for a judicial review of the original decision. It is a different thing for the monitor to conclude on the merits and for a judge to conclude on whether the Home Secretary's view was reasonable. We have always accepted that the reasonableness test is a harsher test than the merits test. In other words, the monitor might conclude that the place was not a good one. Yet a judge might take the view that the Home Secretary, in reaching the opposite conclusion, was reasonable. We accept that.

In fact, the Home Secretary is replicating the effect of that which the Minister of State said was impossible to replicate and which the Government would never accept

[Mr. Oliver Letwin]

replication of, either the day before yesterday or yesterday. The circumstances of the Conservative party are such that I have lost track of time in the past 48 hours.

Finally, I have a request. It is that following the passage of the amendment—I shall be asking my right hon. and hon. Friends not to oppose it, and similarly my noble Friends in the other place—and therefore the Bill, I hope that we shall move forward and discover what is likely to lead to the rapid processing of claims. I believe that that is the aim of everyone in the House. The Home Secretary made that clear in his remarks. It is certainly the aim of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) and of every Member who has spoken in these debates.

2.15 pm

That processing will be better for asylum seekers who have gone through dreadful circumstances and are refugees. It will be better for those who are economic migrants who are seeking to use the system. If they are to be refused, it is better that they should be refused sooner rather than later. It will be better by far for those of our electors who are concerned about the abuse of the system. Finally, it will be better by an enormous proportion for the Home Secretary and his hard-pressed officials if they are not searching round the country for people who have taken a long time to process. It is our joint aim to process fast, fairly and well

I hope that the Home Secretary will look again at something that we have said throughout these debates and which does not reflect on the proposed legislation. As he rightly said, it reflects on the administration of the process, which is the be-all and end-all, however good the legislation. I refer to the human reality that underlies the current chaos. It is that no one of us in the House will be placed in the current position of the decision makers, who are asked to make decisions about people from a dizzying array of different places at great speed, through days and, in some instances, through early evenings. That is done on the basis of abstracts. Thank goodness, as a result of amendments, the abstracts will come under the guidance of independent advice.

None of us, if we were decision makers, could possibly make accurate and compelling decisions about a person from Somalia at 9 o'clock, from Bosnia at 10 o'clock and from Zimbabwe at 11 o'clock. In human terms, that is not doable. I hope and pray for the Home Secretary's sake as much as ours and for the sake of all those who are involved in the process that the right hon. Gentleman will reconsider how it can be so arranged that within the accommodation centres, and more generally outside them before they become the norm, decision makers are asked to make decisions in respect of matters that they actually know about because they relate only to a particular place with which they have a genuine familiarity. That is the crux of turning the system back from a nightmare into a process that operates.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): When my right hon. Friend spoke about Hampstead liberals, I hope that he did not have me in mind. If he did, he may be setting out to ruin my reputation. I warmly welcome what he said about administration, which is important, but it is not the key issue of this debate.

I take a rather cynical view of the length of time that we have spent on the question of accommodation centres. I do not consider it an unimportant question, and the principle about education was an important one, but other parts of the Bill, such as those that will change the support system for in-country applicants and the significant changes to appeals, have not had the attention that they deserve. We would not have spent so long on accommodation centres if none of the sites proposed had been in Tory constituencies—in fact, I doubt that we would have been here this afternoon. I see some heads shaking, but it will be interesting to see what the reactions are when the trials go ahead.

It is a pity that we have spent so long on what is not the most important part of the Bill. The other evening, not a single Back Bencher was able to speak on the vital issue of cutting off support to, potentially, thousands of asylum seekers, because of the way in which the timetable operated.

I none the less welcome an amendment that gives a role to the monitor and clarifies the issues that he can take into account. It recognises that different asylum seekers will be in different situations. Asylum seekers are not a homogeneous group. The monitor will be able to consider whether people are being placed into accommodation centres in a way that suits their individual needs. I do not know how far it will be possible for him to do that for individuals, rather than looking at the broader picture, but the wording of the amendment suggests that he may be able to examine in some detail whether people were being placed appropriately, relative to their needs.

I shall ask two or three specific questions, and I hope that if my right hon. Friend does not have time to answer in detail now, he will be able to put the answers in writing to me later. In the context of location and need, I do not understand why an urban location is seen as suitable for a trial of smaller centres for single people only, but not as somewhere where families might be placed, where, irrespective of the issue of education, children might benefit from community links. What is being proposed seems at odds with that idea.

I want to ask about where people who make "late" applications will be placed, and whether location and need will match. I assume that in general, people who make late applications—that is the term used in the Bill—will be in a situation different from that of somebody newly arrived. Obviously, such people will have been living somewhere within the UK already, but presumably they may still be offered places in accommodation centres. If such a person said that they intended to refuse a placement because the location was unsuitable and did not meet their needs, would that have any implications for the decision on whether their late claim for support would be considered?

In the previous debate we had no opportunity to consider the terms of the decision on late application, so it would help if at some point, if he cannot do so this

afternoon, the Home Secretary set out some of the criteria, and told us about any codes of guidance that may be used in making that critical decision.

Mr. Blunkett: I promise that we will write to my hon. Friend with answers to his questions, but I make it clear now that the in-country claim—the late claim—does not disqualify people from having their asylum claim tested.

Mr. Gerrard: I fully appreciate that, but the arrangement introduces a new hurdle before people can qualify for support and accommodation, does it not? Rather than there being only the one hurdle, of proof of destitution, to clear, there will be a second hurdle—whether the application has been made in time. Presumably, unless the timing hurdle is cleared the question of support, and the test of destitution, will not arise. It would be helpful if we could be given more detail about that, because in the previous debate there was no opportunity to discuss it.

I have another question about need in connection with late applications. One of the categories of people who will still be supported even if they make a late application is defined in the Bill as people with special needs. I assume that if someone has a special need, the location of their accommodation could be critical. Would factors such as the availability of specialist health care be considered? I assume that if an applicant were HIV-positive and would therefore require specialist help, or someone had mental health needs, those special needs would be taken into consideration when determining the location.

It would help us to get a clearer picture if the Secretary of State spelled out some details; again, he can do this later if there is not time this afternoon. This will affect us all when we have to deal with individuals who come to see us because they have been refused support, and it will help if we understand more clearly what "special needs" means, what conditions will be treated as special needs, and how that will affect the location of any accommodation centre in which people may be placed.

We should welcome the change to establishing a monitor with wider powers, and I echo the comments about getting the monitor in place sooner, rather than later. It would also be helpful to know whether there is scope for individuals who feel that they have been located somewhere unsuitable for their needs to ask the monitor to consider their case.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I thank the Home Secretary for his tone, and for the way in which he introduced what I anticipate is this House's last debate on the Bill. Quite properly, it has occupied many of us for a considerable time in recent months, and I make no criticism of the time spent on such matters. In fact, there is much agreement among us, as there was in respect of many elements of the original Bill, such as nationality law reform. The view was correctly reflected that we spent a disproportionate amount of time on accommodation centres, compared with other parts of the Bill.

The Home Secretary, however, was a bit mischievous, as he often is. He said that he is always open to persuasion, and that he responds to arguments not of opposition and rudeness, but of persuasion. I do not doubt that, but it always helps, of course, if one has been persuaded because part of Parliament blocked one's own suggestions. One of the great consolations of a two-Chamber Parliament is that it provides better scrutiny than a one-Chamber Parliament. A paradox about which the Home Secretary and I doubtless share a view is that it is in the unelected Chamber that Labour's share of the vote is much closer to its share of the vote in the country at the last election. It has 28 per cent.—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I please remind the hon. Gentleman of the limits of the debate on this amendment?

Simon Hughes: I shall try to keep very close to those limits, Madam Deputy Speaker. Labour's share of the vote in the unelected Chamber reflects its election result much more accurately than does its share of the vote in this Chamber, whatever the differences between us. The House of Lords has been able fairly regularly to say to the Government, "No, you cannot go down that road." The issue of accommodation centres was, as recently as yesterday, an example of that.

This exercise has already produced many changes on accommodation centres, four of which have been welcomed, and one of which gave rise to today's opportunity. A monitor of accommodation centres was not proposed at the beginning of our deliberations on the Bill. Because we now have a monitor, the Government were able to use that new institution and individual to come to the rescue today. We welcome that, and the fact that persuasion and a bit of political pressure has led not only to a monitor, but to a normal time limit of six months, which even the Government now want to reduce. Legal advice will also be provided, and we know who the dependants are, so a lot of progress has been made.

As the Home Secretary knows, my colleagues and I have argued from the beginning for some form of reception centres. We entirely share the view that the more that we can speed up processing of claims, the better the system will be for all concerned, compatible with justly looking at them all. As I have said before, there is no theology concerning size or location. However, according to all the advice, and to the instincts of those of us on the Liberal Democrat Benches, centres of 750 people and above are much more like camps than accommodation centres. If we place such people away from the services that they need to be linked to, we are also not providing them with the best service.

My final important point about the change is that there is a good case for having people together, with services that are close to each other. As the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, there is a very good case for trying to make life easier by getting officials who know about a particular part of the world to deal with those who come from there. My understanding is that that is the intended use for Oakington after the Bill is passed. Certain groups of people, perhaps those from EU applicant countries, will go there. I hope that we are all united in saying that if that is the argument we should make it, and should not let it by implication—not in this House, but elsewhere—be acceptable that asylum seekers are to be dealt with only in places where they are out of sight and, therefore, out of mind, in the way that lepers and mentally ill

[Simon Hughes]

people were treated in the past. That is not the approach to take. We have an international obligation to look after people and we should do so.

2.30 pm

We accept that the Government's amendments are a substantial improvement on the view that they have taken before, in that some scrutiny will take place. I add my voice to the point made by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), and by the right hon. Member for West Dorset from the Conservative Front Bench, that the monitor should be requested to consider the proposals in advance. That is the logical approach. It is no good spending time on planning, design or planning applications unless the monitor says that the location is good. I hope that that is what will happen in practice. It would be helpful if the Home Secretary could confirm at the first available opportunity that from now on all the sites that he may have in mind—large or small, mixed or single sex, for families or single people—will be the subject of prior consultation with the Local Government Association, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the equivalent organisations in Wales and Northern Ireland, if the Government have those places in mind.

We would have preferred the original wording, under which the decisions would have been open to judicial scrutiny and we could have been satisfied that a particular location was suitable. That was not possible, so we would have preferred the wording added by the other place last night, which provided that the Home Secretary should have regard to the needs of the people to be accommodated. We may not win that argument either, although we will vote for the Lords amendment. However, I have talked to my colleagues in the other place and they accept that if the Government prevail in the House this afternoon, they will not further obstruct the passage of the Bill and it will pass into law before the end of the Session.

The Liberal Democrats have sought to put their case on the Bill, and we therefore divided the House nine times on Tuesday. We were grateful to colleagues from all parties for joining us on many of those occasions. The last three attempts at legislation in this area have not been hugely successful. We hope that this Bill will be more successful, but not everything will be right. Our job is to be vigilant at local government level, Government level and Parliament level, and to take up matters with Ministers if we are not doing the right job by asylum seekers. We must seek to change the things that turn out to be wrong.

In dealing with those who come to Britain seeking asylum, humanity and decency are as important as efficiency. Our international reputation is as much affected by how we treat the strangers at our gates as it is by how we treat our own. That is why this has been an important debate. We are glad to have been able to influence the Government to make significant changes so that the Bill is now in much better form than when we started.

Glenda Jackson: We have little time and I know that other hon. Members wish to participate. I am also mindful of your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker, on entering the no-go area of the separate education of refugees' children and of the sensibilities of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to a too passionate advocation, using certain adjectives, of deeply held feelings in my constituency.

I took some hope from what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said about the system. He said that the Government would concentrate on making it firm, fast or fair, and acknowledged that it is none of those things at present, despite the claims that have been made.

I shall come to the question of location in a moment, but first I shall deal with accommodation centres. Running them will require lots of money and people, and they will take no small period of time to bring into being. They will deal with a comparatively small number of asylum seekers, compared with the numbers already in this country and the numbers who will arrive before the centres open.

When I speak about the failures in the system, I mean no criticism of the incredibly dedicated and hard-working people in the IND. The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) spoke pertinently about the decisions that they have to make every day. The IND requires additional support, finance and staff. The system also needs to be streamlined, so that staff do not have to deal with so many cases at the same time. Often those cases are at different stages of processing. I hope that the Government are looking at that matter now, as it is no exaggeration to say that many people—my constituents among them—have been waiting an unconscionable time for their cases to be prosecuted.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is going somewhat wide of the amendment.

Glenda Jackson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I turn now to the location of the accommodation centres. The proposal is that the numbers involved will be much smaller than first advocated, and that the centres will deal only with single men. I do not expect my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to answer now, but I should be grateful if he would write to me with answers to the questions that I want to ask.

What will be the age range of men in accommodation centres? In my constituency, it is not unusual for a member of a family to arrive in this country who is then followed by the rest of the family at a later date. A single man coming into this country may not understand that the word "single" in this context means unmarried, in our lexicon. If asked whether he is a single man, he may well say that he is, even though he has a wife—or a common law wife—and children. What will happen if his family succeeds in gaining entry to this country? Would that man have to stay in the accommodation centre? Where would the rest of his family go? When the monitors assess locations, will they also assess the changes that the presence of asylum seekers undoubtedly cause?

I am also worried about the facilities that will be provided in the accommodation centres. We have heard about the need for the centres to provide everything that

asylum seekers might need. However, concerns have been expressed about the proper provision of health services. I shall not go down the road of asking whether every school in the country has its full complement of teachers, but serious questions remain—for instance, about the services provided by members of the legal profession into processing asylum cases. It seems to me that there will be an unavoidable conflict between what will be provided in the areas where the accommodation centres will be located, what will be provided for the centres, and what will be provided to improve the system that is provided by the IND.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) spoke about the image that this country will present when we make clear our approach to people fleeing from a justified fear of persecution. I agree with what he said, and believe that this country will retain its reputation for offering asylum to people who are frail and often very vulnerable. It is surely an indication that a country is civilised when most of its people want asylum seekers to be treated speedily and effectively.

Tony Baldry: On Second Reading, I said that everyone in the House must share the responsibility of trying to get this legislation right. As a consequence of the work that Parliament has done—by persevering throughout the passage of the Bill, with the help of the House of Lords—the legislation is substantially better. We have an independent monitor for accommodation centres, which was not included in the Bill to start with.

Today, the Home Secretary announced a substantial concession, because the monitor will effectively be able to determine whether a location meets the needs of asylum seekers. Realistically, before any accommodation centre can be built, the Home Office will have to announce a proposed location and the monitor of accommodation centres will have the opportunity to hear views on whether that location would prevent any of the needs of the proposed residents from being met. In so doing, the monitor will obviously want to take evidence not only from local people but from all the organisations that wrote to the Home Secretary on 3 May—the Refugee Council, Immigration Advisory Service, National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, Commission for Racial Equality, and others.

As I am sure the Home Secretary will appreciate, one reason why the House of Lords so persistently returned the Bill to this House—in particular, this part of the Bill—was that the Government had not found a single supporter among the organisations most concerned about the welfare of refugees. In the letter of 3 May and subsequently, every organisation that was concerned about the welfare of refugees opposed the suggestion that accommodation centres should be large and in rural locations.

In the proposed amendment—the concession that the Government are making—the Home Secretary is giving all organisations the opportunity to express their concerns rationally to the independent monitor, supporting them with such evidence as they have. I should have thought, therefore, that it must be in everyone's interests, not least the Treasury, for the right hon. Gentleman to announce as soon as it is convenient that he is going to postpone the planning applications for Bicester and the proposed site in Nottinghamshire until the independent monitor has had the opportunity to consider those locations. Otherwise, the planning application will go ahead and it will involve much public spending—not only for the Home Office, but for the local authorities concerned. That could result in a ludicrous situation—all that money might be spent and then the independent monitor of accommodation centres might be of the opinion that the location would not meet certain needs of the asylum seekers.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not want to mislead the hon. Gentleman. I spoke to him before we came into the Chamber and I reinforce what I told him then, which is that we will not be withdrawing the planning applications. We are talking about an assessment of need, not whether there is a need for accommodation centres in a particular location or setting. We ought to be absolutely clear about that.

Tony Baldry: I am grateful to the Home Secretary and the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration for their courtesy throughout our proceedings on the Bill. I understood very clearly what he said before I came into the Chamber, which is why I am making these points.

Under the Bill, the independent monitor of accommodation centres will have to decide whether the location of any centre

"prevents a need of its residents from being met."

I think that the courts will effectively construe "a need" as any need. Therefore, if an independent monitor has to consider whether "any need" can be properly met, that adjudication and decision would be far better taken before money is spent on a planning application for a proposed accommodation centre. If the Home Secretary wants to persevere with the two proposed sites at Bicester and just outside Nottingham, it would be better to refer that matter now or as soon as possible to the independent monitor of accommodation centres so that evidence can start to be taken from the various organisations that I have mentioned. I appreciate that the Home Secretary has had to reflect a lot over the past two days and I hope that he will reflect further upon this in the days to come, otherwise a considerable amount of public money could be wasted.

I would like to thank Baroness Anelay, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) for all that they have done. This House and the other place have made this a substantially better Bill. I hope that it will now enable—

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *put the Questions necessary for the disposal of of proceedings to be concluded at that hour, pursuant to Order [5 November].*

Question put, That the House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 248, Noes 38.

Division No. 360] **[2:46 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra

Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stunell, Andrew
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Tom Brake and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke

Question accordingly agreed to

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that it has been drawn to your attention that Whitehall was closed for a large percentage of the time when we were voting. It would seem from the figures that a large number of Conservative Members were unable to vote. I wonder whether the Serjeant at Arms has been able to indicate to you whether all right hon. and hon. Members who wished to vote were able to participate in the Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I was advised that Whitehall was closed, and therefore allowed additional time for hon. Members to reach the Lobbies. I am advised that Whitehall is now open.

Amendments proposed: (a) and (b) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 17B.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question put, That the amendments be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 251, Noes 37.

Division No. 361] **[3:00 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra

Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stunell, Andrew
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Tom Brake and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke

Question accordingly agreed to.

3.11 pm

Sitting suspended, pursuant to order [29 October].

4.10 pm

On resuming—

Animal Health Bill

Lords Reasons for insisting on certain of their amendments to which the Commons have disagreed, considered.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I have to acquaint the House that a message has been received from the House of Lords relating to the Animal Health Bill. A paper setting out the Lords Reasons for insisting on certain of their amendments is available in the Vote Office. There is also a separate paper containing the motions and amendments in lieu to be moved by the Government. Under the Order of 6 November, any message received from the Lords relating to that Bill must be considered forthwith.

I remind the House that proceedings on the Lords message must be concluded in one hour from now.

Clause 6

TREATMENT: POWER OF ENTRY

Lords Reason 14B.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I beg to move, That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment (a) in lieu, Lords Reason 22B, the Government motion to insist and Government amendment (a) thereto, Lords Reason 35B, the Government motion to insist and Government amendment (a) thereto and Lords Reason 65B, the Government motion to insist and Government amendment (a) thereto.

Mr. Morley: We held a detailed debate on the issuing of warrants, and I made it clear that we understood the arguments of Opposition Members and some of my hon. Friends, especially in Committee, on representations.

I made it very clear that it was impossible for the Government to accept the Lords amendment because of the difficulties with legal precedents that it would create for the process of issuing warrants. However, I took the point made by Members from both Opposition parties and by my hon. Friends that we should give some reassurance to people who choose to make representations to the divisional veterinary manager. Their case might be accepted or rejected. I explained to the House that many hundreds of applications to the DVM in relation to contiguous culling and other issues had been accepted and exemptions had been made. However, it is not impossible that, for the purposes of disease control, the Department would apply for a magistrate's warrant to enter private property.

I followed the debate in the other place, where a few people still seemed to be obsessed with the culling issue, so I must emphasise that the Bill is not just about culling, as I think this House accepts. There will be cases—as there have been in the past—where people will refuse access for serology and even for vaccination. I stress that point.

In cases where representation to the DVM has been made and turned down, a magistrate's warrant is sought. I repeat again that the magistrate has an obligation to take into account the representation made by the Department and to grant a warrant for such application only if there is a reasonable case to do so. I am sure that magistrates will take that obligation seriously.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): During the last foot and mouth outbreak how many powers-of-entry cases did the Government lose?

Mr. Morley: I think that there were four cases and the Government lost two, although I am not sure that all of them involved powers of entry—there was a range of issues. I can give my hon. Friend the details. In fact, in one case that we lost, the premises were subsequently found to be infected.

Our proposals would speed the process and ensure that people have opportunities to make representations to the DVM. As I pointed out, the magistrate's obligation is only to grant a warrant when there is a reasonable case to do so. The intention of the amendment was to allow the farmer to ensure that his or her side of the story is taken into account by the magistrate.

We cannot concede the idea of having a High Court-type hearing in front of a magistrate because it is impossible to move one legal procedure to a magistrates legal procedure, and there would be all sorts of difficulties relating to precedent. However, what we propose is that the information that the Department will make available to the magistrate must include a statement on whether any representation has been made by the occupier of the land or premises to an inspector about the purpose for which the warrant is sought. First, the magistrate will need to know whether an objection has been made. Secondly, there will be a summary of any such representation.

Obviously, the Department will put its side of the case in the application and say why it seeks a warrant, but it will also provide a summary of the objections made by the occupier of the land or premises, so that the magistrate can consider both sides of the argument in deciding whether to grant the warrant. Those are the principal points that Opposition Members made, and I understand them, so I am trying to respond in a way that reflects not only the legal process, but the concerns that have been expressed.

Andrew George (St. Ives): The Minister will understand that the primary reason why the amendment was tabled was to ensure that both sides of the story are fully presented to the magistrate. Can the hon. Gentleman assure the House that the summary will be a fair representation of what the farmer or landowner has put to the DVM? Will the farmer or landowner have an opportunity to inspect that summary before it is forwarded to the magistrate?

Mr. Morley: Of course we will issue internal guidance on the details of the summary and the way that our Department, vets and DVM will proceed. Of course that internal guidance will be open to parliamentary scrutiny by asking parliamentary questions, and we have no reason to keep it secret.

The arrangements must not be too bureaucratic and complicated, but there is a legal obligation on any member of the Department to be truthful and honest in his or her submission when applying for a warrant. Therefore, there is a legal obligation on the Department to ensure that the principal points are fairly and accurately represented in relation to the submissions that the farmer, occupier or landowner may make to the DVM, so I give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. Of course, the work of the Department will be open to normal parliamentary scrutiny.

I return to the fact that I accept the point, which has been made on several occasions, that trust is an issue. We understand that and want to ensure that there can be trust in relation to what the Department is doing. In the end, we want to control disease effectively, minimise the impact on the livestock sector and, if there is a disease outbreak, control it while keeping the number of animals culled to a minimum and causing minimum disruption to the livestock industry, the countryside and the rural economy. That is our priority. That is why we are developing the contingency arrangements and the animal health and welfare strategy, all of which will be public documents and open for consultation and scrutiny in the parliamentary process. We very much welcome such participation; it is part of the trust-building process.

I acknowledge the constructive role of all parties and parliamentary spokespeople in both Houses in relation to the quite significant changes made during the proceedings on the Bill, and we have tried to acknowledge the genuine concerns and perfectly reasonable points that have been made by my hon. Friends and Opposition Members. That is reflected in relation to these amendments.

I very much hope that the House will agree to the motion and accept the amendments in the spirit in which they are offered to complete the passage of the Bill.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The Minister's gracious and generous approach is a healthy sign of the Government's recognition that the amendments made throughout the Bill's progress in the other place and the comments made in this Chamber were designed to be helpful. The amendments have been largely non-partisan, although they were of course pioneered principally by the Conservative party with help from Cross Benchers and the minor parties, including the Liberal Democrats. It is in that spirit that the Minister has come to the House with a helpful amendment to allow us to make progress.

I shall, however, briefly rehearse why the matter is significant. I want to amplify the point acknowledged by the Minister, which is that warrants are important. Magistrates should make a balanced and reasonable judgment based on a full understanding on each side of the argument, so that the landowner or farmer knows that his case has been heard, and the magistrate can be confident that he has all the facts at his disposal before he issues a warrant. That is important because most of these warrants will result in the culling of healthy animals. Obviously, that will always be done for proper purposes, but we must remember that dramatic events will ensue from the process.

[Mr. John Hayes]

Warrants are important also because they are emblematic of the trust mentioned by the Minister. Yesterday I repeatedly made the point that the trust of farmers and the industry in the Government's approach to important matters of animal health will be fundamental if we are to put together an effective strategy for dealing with these events cohesively. That trust was damaged by the foot and mouth outbreak.

I understand why the problems arose and I know that the circumstances were not easy, and one could make several points in mitigation, but trust was damaged. In that knowledge, we have to proceed with great caution, and in a spirit of generosity and co-operation, to rebuild the trust that predicates the right approach to dealing with any future such problems. Warrants are the salient issue, and the House of Lords has made such a great issue of warrants because they are at the apex of the concerns about trust, partnership and the rebuilding of relationships.

The issue boils down to people's ability to make their case to magistrates. The Government have said that the method suggested by the Lords is not legally possible. I am not qualified to make a judgment about the law, so we must take the Minister's statement at face value. We have been presented with a solution that is reasonable, although not perfect—the House would hardly expect me to say that it is perfect.

I am also reassured by the Minister's response to the intervention by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), in which he said that representations would, of necessity, be made in a balanced and fair manner. That clearly answers many of the points made by Baroness Byford, who, with Lord Plumb and others, has played a remarkable role in framing so much of the important content of the Bill alongside—I will not say ahead of—those in the Government, who have also done their best. In those circumstances, it would be inappropriate for Conservative Members not to acknowledge that considerable movement and the splendid victory on the part of all Members on this side of the House, who have, by the force of their persuasive argument, encouraged the Minister to offer this generous settlement.

Andrew George: Like the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), I appreciate the concession that the Minister has brought to the House, and the graciousness with which he has handled it. We have had a proper debate, which has resulted in effective scrutiny of the relevant clause of the Bill. Although the measure does not go as far as we would like, we have reached a satisfactory concessionary position, which at least takes us considerably further forward in respect of making sure that the two sides of the story are clearly and transparently presented to magistrates.

Mr. Drew: May I pose one issue that worries me? If a warrant is issued, and, for whatever reason, the people concerned do not want the vaccination or cull, but a third party does want it, will they also be mentioned in the warrant, or will it be left to the divisional veterinary manager to take up their part?

Andrew George: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is directing his question through me to the Minister. I shall happily act as a conduit on this occasion if he so wishes. If he is thinking of an example in which a landowner takes a particular view, but a tenant farmer takes a different view, that matter needs to be resolved. Perhaps the Minister will ponder on that before I conclude.

The Minister was gracious in acknowledging—the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings was almost as gracious, although he did not properly reflect this fact—that the concession under discussion is the result of amendments tabled by Liberal Democrats in another place. My noble Friend Lord Greaves has been particularly assiduous in pursuing this matter to a rightful, better and more positive conclusion than might otherwise have been the case. Some issues still need to be clarified, however, and I shall quickly refer to four.

First, farmers need to know about their right to appeal to the DVM. Will the Minister make it clear—because it is not clear in the Bill—that when the farmer or landowner is informed of the intention to seek a warrant, a right of appeal is available to them at that stage? At the same time, will the Minister also address the question of what other information and transparency this process will be afforded? In particular, will it be made clear to the farmer or landowner what time scale is available in which to respond to any suggested application for warrant? What procedure must they follow, and in what form do they make that appeal? Will he ensure, too, that the procedure is clear and transparent?

Mr. Hayes: I do not want to prolong the debate or test the patience of the House by continuing too long. The hon. Gentleman may be mindful of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) last night, however, and it is important to point out that, in these circumstances, a landowner or farmer will often be in some difficulties. They may be trapped on their farm, and bewildered and confused by what they face. It is particularly important in those circumstances that clear and comprehensible information is made available to them, and that they are given every support in making their case as the Minister has described.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman is right. I am sure that the Minister fully appreciates that much trauma and emotion is associated with the process. As throughout the Bill's passage, I know that he understands that clarity and transparency are essential, because farmers and landowners might not think quite as straight in such circumstances as they would do on other occasions. That is why they need to be helped through the process.

4.30 pm

Farmers must be clear about their rights, the time scale and the procedure to be used. The Minister dealt with my earlier question about whether the farmer would be assured that the summary statement made to the magistrate would be a fair reflection of the message that the farmer intended to send. Therefore, on the basis of the Minister's clear and reassuring response to questions, I again make it clear that we think this is a

helpful concession that goes some way to addressing the genuine concerns that were properly articulated in yesterday's debate and in the debates in another place.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Following the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), far be it from me to be anything other than gracious. However, I want to consider two or three points briefly.

The Minister said that Conservative Members appear to be obsessed with culling. That is not the case. We all recognise that the Bill is about many different issues. However, I merely point out that part 1 is entitled "Slaughter", so the issue is at the heart of the Bill. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to want to discuss that point in relation to the powers of entry, the misuse of which caused so much concern to farmers.

My second point is about whether the warrants would entail a novel legal principle. A moment ago, I was reading *Hansard* and the Minister's response to my second intervention when I said that it would surely be possible to distinguish between different kinds of warrants issued for different purposes. His only answer was:

"I am not a legal expert".—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2002; Vol. 392, c. 384.]

Therefore, everything will depend on the quality of the legal advice that he receives from his departmental lawyers.

Mr. Morley: It is first class.

Mr. Bacon: I am sure that it is first class, but the Ministry went around merrily slaughtering perfectly healthy animals without either a legal or scientific basis for doing so until the case of MAFF *v.* Upton. At that point, the court had the full scientific information before it and MAFF stopped doing what it was doing and did not contest the action any further. That suggested that it had been wrong all along. The Minister did not address that point yesterday.

That brings me to my next point. The Minister is determined to avoid the creation of novel legal principles, but the creation of a situation in which the Government go into a magistrates court and effectively bat for both sides—they make the case for a warrant while carrying statements from the farmer saying why there should not be a warrant—will be nothing other than a novel legal principle. The Government will bat for both sides, but the farmer will not be allowed to act in his own interest or have a solicitor acting for him. That seems to be a novel principle.

However, it would be wrong to be graceless. My hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings assures me that we have achieved a valuable victory, and if he is right, that can be due only to the work of the fine and noble Baroness Byford who is probably the heroine of the hour.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful for the comments of hon. Members. On the question raised by the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), the important point about the warrants is the procedure under which they will be issued. The magistrate must consider whether the request is reasonable, whoever applies for a warrant, and must also take account of why someone should want to resist a warrant. We are going a little further by providing information to the magistrate, who has an obligation to take into account all the arguments when making the decision.

In response to the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), I very much hope that applying for a warrant will be an act of last resort—that it will not be common, a standard procedure or something that we would want in the normal course of any disease-control strategy. Sadly, as with a range of issues and not only those relating to disease control, there will always be times when we might need such a power, especially in disease control when facing a national emergency. We accept that this is a major issue, which is why the power should be used only as a last resort. It is important that we engage stakeholders in considering disease control and management in a way that minimises any need for such a measure. That is the Government's declared objective.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will the Minister clarify whether the magistrate would if he thought it necessary be able to offer a hearing to the farmer or tenant farmer against whom the warrant had been issued?

Mr. Morley: That was the intention of the original Lords amendment, but as a Government we cannot concede that. All our legal advice suggests that it would be unprecedented to allow, in effect, a court hearing in front of a magistrate. As we debated yesterday, if that concession were made, we would have to allow the individual time to find a solicitor to seek legal advice or secure legal aid. The time taken would expand and the situation would become so complex that it would negate the idea of moving quickly. I am trying to retain the facility to move quickly on disease control in an emergency while respecting people's right to put an alternative point of view. The procedure will be to make representations to the DVM, who can decide to support them. The next step would be to apply for a warrant—now with the guarantee of a written submission on the other side of the argument.

It is true that when the Prime Minister met Cumbrian farmers during the last epidemic, they told him not that there was too much slaughter but that there was not enough and that culling needed to be speeded up. For whatever reason, people might argue that animals should be culled—I assume that that is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) was making—but the decision whether to do so must be taken only on veterinary grounds, and that depends on the veterinary and scientific advice at the time.

We want to support alternative approaches as part of engaging the industry and relevant stakeholders in future contingency plans for a range of diseases, and in the longer term strategy on animal health and welfare. That is all part of building confidence and trust and involving the industry—giving it a say in the strategies and helping it to understand the reasons and arguments behind them. That must be a priority. I very much hope that the measures in the Bill will be of last resort.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does the Minister agree that it is essential that magistrates receive training in the exercise of these powers and

[Mr. Roger Williams]

duties? Although we all hope that the need to use them would never arise, if it did, there would be no time to instruct them on their nature.

Mr. Morley: Magistrates already receive training, and part of it is to take into account reasonableness.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) raised an important point about how farmers and landowners would become aware of the procedures. I reassure him that one of the changes that we have introduced as part of the lessons learned is that, should there be a decision to cull, the first thing that will be done is to send a note to the farmers concerned informing them of that fact and why the decision had been taken. We can include information on such procedures in those notes, so that they will be aware of their rights.

The whole idea of the slaughter note, which is part of the slaughter protocol, is to explain why a measure is being applied. The need to explain in certain circumstances why culling may be necessary is an improvement and marks a step forward in communication. Even with the greater prominence of vaccination, which I welcome, we have to accept that it is likely that culling will be used for different reasons, depending on the epidemic and the advice given. We need to understand that.

I thank my colleague, Lord Whitty, and my parliamentary colleagues for their contributions. I also thank my officials for their hard work. They have been very much involved in the Bill. I am also grateful for the guidance from the Chair on procedural matters.

The Bill is not about looking back. I hope that its measures allow us to look forward to future disease control strategies, which I have no doubt will be very different from earlier strategies. There will be greater involvement in the process. There are new opportunities, new technologies, new methods of working, improved communications and better contingency arrangements for a range of risks that threaten the livestock industry. I hope that the Bill is seen not as a threat to the industry, but as part of a range of measures designed to engage it, to give people a say and, above all, to ensure that we have a first-class livestock industry equipped to deal with the various threats that it faces from a variety of sources.

Question put and agreed to.

Government amendments in lieu of subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

4.43 pm

Sitting suspended, pursuant to order [29 October].

6.30 pm

On resuming—

Message to attend the Lords Commissioners:

The House went; and, having returned:

Royal Assent

6.58 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that the House has been to the House of Peers, where a Commission under the Great Seal was read, authorising the Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Act 2002

Employee Share Schemes Act 2002

Public Trustee (Liability and Fees) Act 2002

Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002

Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs etc.) Act 2002

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Commonwealth Act 2002

Enterprise Act 2002

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002

Animal Health Act 2002

HSBC Investment Banking Act 2002

Barclays Group Reorganisation Act 2002

Milford Haven Port Authority Act 2002

City of London (Ward Elections) Act 2002

Prorogation

Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech

Mr. Speaker: I have further to acquaint the House that the Lord High Chancellor, one of the Lord Commissioners, delivered Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Command. For greater accuracy, I have obtained a copy and also directed that the terms of the speech be printed in the Journal of the House. Copies are being made available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government has taken action in support of economic stability and sound public finances, and has continued to increase investment in public services and tackle child poverty.

Education is my Government's top priority. An Act has been passed to promote diversity, choice, innovation and higher standards in schools. The Act provides new opportunities for school partnerships, improved support for teachers, more options for tackling weak and failing schools and greater freedom for successful headteachers and governors.

Legislation has been passed to reform health services and strengthen regulation of the health professions.

An Act has been passed to increase powers against money laundering, establish a Criminal Assets Recovery Agency and make it easier to recover the proceeds of crime and drugs.

Legislation has been passed to modernise and reform the police service and to establish a new complaints system.

Legislation has been passed to reform and streamline the system for dealing with immigration and applications for asylum.

Legislation has been passed to reform employment dispute resolution procedures and to introduce new employment rights, including measures to balance work and parental life.

Legislation was also passed which introduced a new system of tax credits and a new pension credit for pensioners.

An Act was passed to improve productivity and enterprise through reform of the competition, insolvency and consumer protection regimes.

Draft legislation has been brought forward on a number of matters including on Communications, Local Government and Extradition.

Members of the House of Commons

I thank you for the provision you have made for the work and dignity of the Crown and for the public service.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

In Northern Ireland, my Government continued to work closely with the political parties and the Irish Government to secure the full implementation of the Belfast Agreement.

Acts have been passed to maintain the arrangements on decommissioning and to reform the criminal justice system, both part of the Belfast Agreement. Provision has been made for new measures to combat electoral fraud in Northern Ireland.

My Government has continued to co-operate with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the interests of all of the people of the United Kingdom. A White Paper was published outlining proposals for devolution to the English regions.

My Government invited Parliament to set up a joint committee of both Houses to enable Parliament to reach a view on the second phase of House of Lords reform. Legislation was passed to allow political parties to make positive moves to increase the representation of women in public life.

An Act was passed to reform the system of land registration. Legislation was also passed reforming residential leasehold law and improving leaseholders' rights and to create commonhold.

My Government brought forward legislation to make the age of entitlement for concessionary fares the same for men as it is for women.

An Act has been passed to reform adoption law to make children's welfare paramount, encourage more adoption and strengthen regulation of overseas adoptions.

Other important measures have been enacted.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I were pleased to receive the state visit of the King and Queen of Jordan last November.

We recall with pleasure our visits to Jamaica and New Zealand in February and our subsequent visit to Australia on the occasion of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The Duke of Edinburgh and I were also delighted to pay a visit to Canada in October.

Following the shocking events of 11 September, my Government has taken decisive action to help combat terrorism around the world and support the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

My Government has continued to play a leading role in efforts to improve the competitiveness of Europe's economies and bring the European Union closer to its people. Legislation has been enacted enabling the United Kingdom to ratify the Treaty of Nice and implement decisions on the Union's future funding.

My Government has played a key role in agreeing a timetable for enlargement of the European Union and in identifying practical ways to strengthen the Union's foreign and security policy, particularly its support for peace building in the Balkans.

My Government has worked to strengthen NATO, equip it for the challenges of the future and develop its growing partnership with Russia.

My Government has worked for a more effective global effort to reduce poverty, including initiatives on debt relief and HIV/AIDS, and has enacted legislation to strengthen the poverty focus to Britain's development work.

My Government ratified the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change along with other EU partners, as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

In the United Nations, the Commonwealth and other fora my Government has been active in promoting human rights and tackling the causes of conflict, including support for UN efforts in newly independent East Timor.

My Government enacted legislation to grant British citizenship to British Overseas Territories citizens in qualifying territories.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may attend you.

A Commission was also read for proroguing this present Parliament, and the Lord Chancellor said:

"My Lords and Members of the House of Commons: by virtue of Her Majesty's Commission which has now been read, we do, in Her Majesty's name, and in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, prorogue this Parliament to Wednesday the thirteenth day of this instant November, to be then here holden, and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to Wednesday the thirteenth day of this instant November."

End of the First Session (opened on 13 June 2001) of the Fifty-Third Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in the Fifty-First Year of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 5 November 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Post Office Network

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am pleased to introduce this important debate and I am grateful that my colleagues have taken the trouble to attend.

The issue of the post office network has been in front of Governments for a long time. Since the fag end of the last Conservative Administration, Governments have been struggling with the possibility of migrating benefit payments from giro books to automated credit transfer and with the opportunities that that might offer. That will have a big impact on the future of the post office network.

I intend to make a few opening remarks and I hope that my colleagues will join in the debate as it unfolds. I think that I speak for everyone when I say that there is no objection in principle to the concept of the migration of benefits. As the current generation of benefit recipients passes on, it is sensible for the Government to contemplate the longer-term possibilities. For example, my 23-year-old son has just finished a computer science degree at Glasgow university and the likelihood of his wanting to receive his pension by means of a paper giro book is remote.

In principle, we have no difference with the Government on this issue, but genuine concern is being caused by important practical and administrative implications of the programme and by the way in which the migration is being organised and rolled out. The operation is huge and it is important that we get it right. If we do not, essential weekly payments to many families who have to live on low incomes will be prejudiced. The viability of the post office network and the Government's sensible plans to develop and promote e-government will also be prejudiced. A lot is at stake.

I am sure that hon. Members will ask a series of questions to clarify the state of play. Have the Government got a fallback position? Is there a plan B if the roll-out begins to go wrong? How will the Government react if the migration comes unstitched at the seams, errors are made and other problems arise? We would like to be reassured that contingency planning is taking place, that risk assessments have been carried out and that proper arrangements are being made in case unintended consequences make the migration process more difficult than is imagined.

We need that reassurance in the short term. It is five short months until the project goes live. When I talked to representatives of some of the banks that are important players and partners in the exercise, they said that a commercial administrative project on this scale would be piloted for some 18 months before it was rolled out live. The Government have set a very ambitious timetable. We are all crossing our fingers in the hope that everything goes well, but the chances are that something will go wrong and we need to anticipate that in the best way possible.

The viability of the network in the long term is also a matter of concern. Together with my close colleague and neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), I have been in dialogue with a group of postmasters and postmistresses in south-east Scotland. I have to say to the Minister, and I report this to him accurately, that they are losing faith in the project. They are a group of dedicated, committed people, who are trusted by people in their communities. They would be excellent ambassadors and general practitioners, as the PIU report of June 2002 envisaged, and would be excellent people to keep on side. I report to the Minister as honestly as I can, and with as much conviction as I can, that they are reaching the conclusion that the Government are not acting properly or in good faith on the matter. That is an issue of serious concern. It is not me who is saying that, it is those people, and I trust their judgment. They are entrepreneurs who are doing the best that they can, but they can see no long-term future for their businesses. If that is true, it is a matter of real concern for us all.

The PIU report was published in June 2000. It posited the twin platforms of a universal bank, which would be a platform on which sub-postmasters could build an income stream in the future, and the concept of "your guide". The local postmasters saw that those two elements could provide a way forward, and that gave them confidence. The report was well written, the tone was positive and it embraced all the questions that they felt needed to be embraced. They were pleased that the 24 recommendations in the package of measures were as good for them as they could have possibly hoped.

Since June 2000, many of the opportunities presented by those 24 recommendations have been squandered. Many of the recommendations have been watered down. That is certainly the perception of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, which is a matter of real concern. The last recommendation in the PIU report was that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is responsible for the Post Office and all its works, should make progress reports to the Prime Minister from time to time. I am interested to know whether any progress reports have been made. If they have been, could copies of them be placed in the Library so that we can see what progress the Secretary of State feels is being made? There is a suspicion in post offices throughout the United Kingdom that little progress has been made since the report was published in June 2000.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman mentioned "your guide". I do not know whether he actually saw it when it was trialled; it was trialled in my constituency, in Leicestershire. It was very popular with sub-postmasters, and they were very distressed when the project was scuppered because it failed to receive the support of the Department for Work and Pensions and other Departments.

Mr. Kirkwood: That was a timely intervention, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because I was coming on to "your guide". I studied the pilot in his constituency with great interest. I agree that it passed all

[Mr. Kirkwood]

the tests that were set for it as far as the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters was concerned. It was an information network that had the potential to develop commercial and public sector services, in a way that would have produced an income. It would have involved postmasters and postmistresses in the process so that the concept of a general practitioner could really have been sustained, developed and built on.

The abandonment of "your guide" was a retrograde step. We are still trying to understand the consequences of that decision. The decision was wrong, and it will have a direct financial effect on Post Office Ltd. I would like to know the Government's assessment of the financial effect of the cancellation of "your guide" on Post Office Ltd. I would also like to know what the alternatives are. Commercial schemes are supposed to be available to the Post Office to keep the network viable. What is the alternative to "your guide"? It has now gone, which is a shame, but it is right that the Government are held to account. They must come up with an alternative commercial scheme that will replace the benefits that "your guide" could have provided. That is an important issue, and I hope that the Minister will have a chance to deal with it.

I turn to financial assistance for the rural network. I encourage hon. Members from urban constituencies to discuss the diversification programme for urban post offices. The future for such post offices will also be severely prejudiced if they are left to the free market with no support after 2005.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the urban network is suffering from many of the problems that he describes in relation to the rural network. Last week, those of us who represent urban constituencies received a letter from Consignia that listed our local post offices and indicated that about a third of them were set to close. For many of our communities and local parades, the threat is one not simply of damage to the future viability of the business but of immediate closure.

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman makes his point well. I was told at the weekend that when, as part of the reinvention programme, the Post Office wrote to some 8,000 or 9,000 postmasters and postmistresses to ask how many of them would like to take a retirement package with a payoff enabling them to exit their businesses with dignity, some 3,000 opted in. If the Post Office had repeated that exercise after the abandonment of "your guide", twice as many people would have done so.

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): I am listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's speech. I think that I know the answer to this question, but perhaps he can put it on the record. Does he support in principle the compensation arrangements that are being offered as part of the urban renewal programme following the recommendations in the PIU report?

Mr. Kirkwood: The answer is yes, but I do not want the package to be capped. If we are to be fair to postmasters, a package that enables them to leave their businesses with dignity should not be artificially constrained by the financial needs of, or diktats from, the Treasury. Nevertheless, I take the Minister's point. The compensation arrangements are a sensible part of the package, and I encourage the Government to continue to develop them.

As for financial assistance to the rural network, I understood that the partners were to be consulted—indeed, recommendation 6 of the PIU report anticipated that—but I am not sure that that has ever taken place. Does the Minister think that it has?

I want to tax the Minister about the social network payment. Various leaks have suggested that sums of up to £450 million over three years will be provided to subsidise the network. That is a significant amount of public money, but the key factors are whether it will be ring-fenced money that is transferred from—presumably—the Department of Trade and Industry to Post Office Ltd. or Consignia and how much of it will be passed on to the counters in the rural post office network.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): The hon. Gentleman raises a most important point, but the key aspect is not whether the money will come from the DTI, but whether it will be dragged in from the resources of the Royal Mail or will be fresh money. That is the question that the Minister must answer.

Mr. Kirkwood: Absolutely—that is crucial. There is a suspicion out there that the money is to come from some £1.8 billion—£1.8 thousand million—that was creamed off from Post Office profits in the past and is now held as Government stocks or deposits. If it is to be new Treasury money from the consolidated fund, that is a different matter, but it would be extremely useful if the Minister could tell us more.

The other essential issue is that of managed choice versus free choice. I should be happy if the Minister said that everyone and anyone who wanted a Post Office card account would be welcome to have one. I suspect that he will not say that. I am tempted to offer him a Bank of Scotland £5 note as an inducement, but that might be out of order. I do not think, however, that I would be in danger of losing my money.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): My hon. Friend has hit on a very important point. There is real confusion among the public over this matter. The Prime Minister himself gave apparent promises, which are now undermined by what is happening in practice. Does my hon. Friend agree that not only the sub-post offices are suffering from the long period of indecision and lack of clarity over the viability of their businesses? The former Crown offices, which have been privatised in the past eight years, are in the same position.

Mr. Kirkwood: I agree with that point, which is well made. We need better and further particulars about how the process will work. I have looked at some of the journeys, as they are called, described in the literature sent out by the Government to war pension claimants and child benefit recipients. The process is complicated, but it seems quite clear that people will have to "pass" a

telephone interview before they will be allowed to take a card account at the post office. That is a real worry. It is also worrying that the Department for Work and Pensions seems to be in engaged in a process that will disallow—with a capital D—the promotion of Post Office card accounts by postmasters to their own customers. That seems suspicious, and a retrograde step.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): On the point about an unlevel playing field, a sub-postmistress in my constituency was most distressed when representatives from the bank came into her sub-post office to ask for forms to sign people up for having their benefits paid directly into the bank. Of course she did not hand the forms over, but she is not allowed to encourage people to use the post office. I am extremely worried that, in the long run, many people who have always managed their money by cash will be put in a difficult position because they will have to start managing their money through a bank account.

Mr. Kirkwood: Exactly. That is another good example of where suspicion is being built up in the system, which I do not think the Government can ignore. I suspect that the Minister is being told by his advisers that the process is on track, on time and under control, but that is certainly not the perception held by people pursuing their business behind sub-postmasters' counters up and down the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): That suspicion is undoubtedly fuelled by the information coming directly from the Department for Work and Pensions. For example, the application process for child tax credit gives no opportunity to use the Post Office card account—it is not offered as an option to the recipients of that benefit. That seems a tremendous abdication of responsibility on the part of the Department for Work and Pensions, which seems to be distancing itself from the entire Government programme in this area.

Mr. Kirkwood: Indeed. All of this points in the same direction: the Government are capping the number of such accounts. They have set up a business case that means that the number of card accounts that they are prepared to live with will be capped at about 3 million, because anything more than that will start costing them real money. If that is the case, the Government should say so explicitly. The official line, of course, is that there is no cap, but that does not seem to be the case in practice. All the examples given by my hon. Friends in important interventions underline the real suspicion out there that the Government are not coming clean.

It is worse than that. In the Government's application to the European Union for state aids, a couple of paragraphs, which I would quote if I had time, posit the idea of inducements to stay out of Post Office card accounts. That is deeply worrying, because it is a bribe to people to enter basic or full-blown bank accounts rather than use post offices. I can see the reason for that, because there are 3 million unbanked claimants at the moment and I do not know how the Government can work round it if people do not offer to open bank accounts. However, if financial inducements of any kind were offered, it would be a clear sign of bad faith on the part of the Government, which would be deeply worrying.

Mutual advice is essential, and I cannot understand why the Government have not produced a simple leaflet explaining the merits of the three direct methods of payment that are being countenanced after next April. If such a leaflet could be agreed by the partners and made widely available, it would deal with some of the apprehension, fear and uncertainty that some retired people feel about what will hit them after April. No such document is available, and that is not sensible.

I noted with apprehension that SchlumbergerSema was awarded the contract for the roll-out of what is Orwellianly called a customer conversion centre. The company delivers medical services, so it comes with a track record that is, at least, questionable in terms of how it delivers services to the public. In turn, it has subcontracted the call centre to a company called not Vortex but Vertex. What assurances do we have that the Department will control those subcontracts and that mutual advice will be given?

The Government must tell the House how many of the approximately 15 million claimants who now use branch post offices they estimate will move to each of the three separate accounts that are being offered as alternatives to girocheque payments next April? We need to know that. We also need to know how much postmasters will receive in transaction payments for those who transfer in April. Those are important questions.

The Minister knows that much depends on putting back into the system the confidence that has been lost since the PIU report was so badly watered down. A subsidy for a social transfer network may be all very well in the long term, but my postmasters want viable commercial businesses. They do not want subsidised businesses or to live for ever off the back of subsidies from central Government. As things stand, they are not confident that in the long term their businesses will remain viable.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that part of the problem and the reason why consultation is needed is that communities must "use it or lose it"? We must encourage communities, particularly parish councils, to look to the future. Part of the problem is the age profile of some postmasters and postmistresses and the property portfolio. They must be ready for the future and build new market possibilities.

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. The matter is not easy. It involves perceptions and vulnerable people who may be set in their ways and have confidence in the cash-based, weekly payment system. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must continue to use rural and urban post offices or the network will continue to erode. That would be in no one's interest. I hope that the Minister accepts that this is an important debate and that he will answer as many of our questions as possible. Otherwise, the mood of pessimism will gather and get worse.

9.53 am

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on securing this debate. The subject is important to everyone in the House, which is illustrated by the good attendance here this morning. I am sure that it is one of many debates that we shall have as the subject continues to occupy us.

Like other hon. Members, I have kept in touch with Post Office Counters Ltd. The communications that come to us are full of warm words, but warm words butter no parsnips. I want to flag up for my hon. Friend the Minister the concern felt in my post office community in Plymouth. I acknowledge the work that he and his predecessor, now the Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), have done to secure a not insignificant package—£210 million, I think—which will help the urban network reinvention programme. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said that he hoped to hear from urban Members, and I have a totally urban constituency.

It is seven months since postmasters heard from Consignia. In April, it wrote to them outlining the package that it was hoping to develop subject to the European Union's approval. The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness introduced the motion to release the money on 15 October, and the programme can now proceed.

We all hope that there will be a match between post offices choosing to go or to stay and our constituents' need for existing and new post office services. I talked to Mr. David Oakland, one of my sub-postmasters in Plymouth, who is treasurer of his local association. The Minister's predecessor met my local association and was impressed by its members' commitment to finding a new way forward for post offices, and by their understanding of the need for change.

My hon. Friend the Minister would be most welcome to meet my post office community to discuss some of their concerns and listen to their ideas for the way forward. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said that there is a need for people to be able to feel confident that support exists for remaining post offices, not just by giving them money but by encouraging the business that can sustain them and giving returns on investment. We must give people the confidence that we are serious about encouraging the new banking arrangements. I am aware of the good track record on social inclusion and its financial aspects that the Minister brings to his job. Post offices must be confident that we are serious about fully encouraging new banking arrangements, and helping them to secure small business banking.

As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said, there is apprehension about whether support exists. I want to flag up with the Minister two sources from which that stems. First, I understand that some post offices, which have made an initial appraisal of what is expected of the offices receiving the investment to develop services and take on extra work, are concerned that the expected extra work and the income generated from it may not break even in terms of investment for some time. I think that they are expected to match that investment funding in some way.

The second source of apprehension is the experience with the Inland Revenue. Mr. Oakland wrote to me before I rang him, and drew to my attention the concern that in the middle of negotiations with the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters the Inland Revenue sent out literature before it had finished consultations on advice leaflets available in post offices that did not mention the post office solution. The Revenue unilaterally brought forward the start date. That experience has undermined people's confidence in just how serious the Government are about enabling post offices to take on such business. That view is reflected in relation to the Veterans Agency and the Child Support Agency. Mr. Oakland is going to send me those views, which I will take up with the Minister.

Sub-postmasters are not filled with confidence about their future by that experience. They need to feel that their business is financially viable and they must be given greater confidence that it is worth their while to invest their energy as well as their money in the future of the Post Office.

My hon. Friend the Minister explained why we must be careful to protect the interests of future users of the Post Office card account that he mentioned in the debate on 15 October. However, I would like him carefully to consider how the information about it—the helpline—could act as a barrier. Could the service be evened out in some way? I appreciate the point that he made about it, but I would like him to consider whether those who are ticking a box to go through a bank account might be invited also to tick a box to ask for information about Post Office services and how their bank will work with the Post Office to offer new services.

Such information is important to people in Plymouth such as Mr. Nix from Crown Hill, who wrote to me recently about the continued availability of Post Office services:

> "I am the first to accept progress and understand pension books are outdated but I cannot believe the government would endorse 'Postmaster Generals' being pressurised to withhold information on such an important subject."

In the debate on the motion to release money for the programme, my hon. Friend was kind enough to assure me that hon. Members will be properly consulted and that Postwatch will have sufficient resources to help us to ensure that Post Office services meet the needs of present and future generations of our constituents.

Will my hon. Friend encourage Post Office Counters Ltd, to give an extra guarantee about services within half a mile in the poorest 10 per cent. of wards? Is there scope for new post offices, particularly in areas where work must be done on financial inclusion? I am thinking in particular of an area in my constituency, Mount Wise, in which the necessary facilities do not exist. Will he confirm that natural communities cluster around post offices and that in Plymouth, which is a very hilly city, the geographic layout of the city will be taken into account in the criteria that are used?

Members of the Efford community forum and I have been working very hard to get the Torridge way shops back in use again. That is the one part of my constituency that has gone downhill since 1997. The post office and Co-op shop are still there but other shops have closed. The post office business may not be thriving as it should and may not have the track record to justify

being chosen for the new programme, but I hope that special consideration will be given to the investment needed to sustain post offices in communities such as Efford.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. It may be helpful if I remind everyone that it is customary to commence winding-up contributions 30 minutes before the end of the debate. Looking at the clock, I see that we have only 27 minutes left. The Chair always seeks to allow everyone to speak, as far as is possible, but it will be very difficult under these circumstances, so I appeal to right hon. and hon. Members to be brief, succinct and to the point.

10.4 am

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Mr. Cook, may I begin by—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When the House in its wisdom decided to hold meetings in this Chamber, it selected the four senior members of the Chairmen's Panel to act as Deputy Speakers. While they occupy the Chair, they are to be addressed as Deputy Speaker, please.

Mr. Page: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for my lapse.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on choosing and securing the debate. I have a strong suspicion that today's debate will not be the last on the subject, and that there will be many more of them in the coming months. It is apposite that we are having the debate on the first full day on which the organisation is called the Royal Mail Group, the name to which it changed from Consignia—of course, shareholders approved both names. Whatever I am going to say today, I attach no guilt to the Minister. He is innocent, and the guilty have moved on—in some cases they have been promoted. I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire about why the changes were not brought forward earlier and why they were not piloted.

One year after the Labour party gained power, delays in getting things moving were drawn to its attention. The then Minister, the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), said:

"we are rebuilding a Post Office from the wreck left by the previous Government. From day one of this Government we have made the Post Office a priority and will continue to do so."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1998; Vol.331, c. 501.]

One year later, when he was reminded that things should be got on with quickly, he said that he had

"to deal with the shambles"

with which I had left him

"and . . . introduce measures for the future of the Post Office in a sophisticated way".—[*Official Report*, 13 January 1999; Vol.323, c. 269.]

The tune did not change. One year after that, the Minister at that time, the hon. Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), said:

"We do not want to upset"

the Conservative Benches

"unduly. If I was being kind, I would call their stewardship maladroit. If I was being unkind, I would say that Postman Pat's black and white cat would have provided better stewardship of the Post Office over the term of the previous Government."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 2000; Vol. 344, c. 868.]

We heard nothing in 2001, but it all came out on 13 June, when we found that Consignia had lost more than £1 billion and the post office network, which we are discussing today, had lost £163 million. It does not look as though that will change over the next year or so. If we were being maladroit, what is the verdict on the Government? They are losing more than £1 billion, they are going to make 30,000 people redundant and they are closing more than 3,000 post offices. Perhaps the Prime Minister will come to the Dispatch Box and tell us exactly what he thinks of his stewardship of the Post Office. I say that with genuine anger because post offices and sub-post offices are closing, and I wonder what reasons are behind it.

One year ago, I asked why the Government had come forward with a plan to close post office facilities by introducing automated credit transfers without having a parallel plan ready to provide post offices with an alternative income. Why were those plans not implemented in parallel? Why were they implemented to different time scales?

Again, I am going to tread down the path laid out by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. At present, 15 to 16 million people use our sub-post offices, and it has been calculated that some 3 million people have a Post Office card account. We have to ask how the figure of 3 million has been calculated because I do not know the reasoning behind it. We might be tempted to think that the remaining 12 to 13 million people will use basic bank accounts, but 85 per cent. of the 15 to 16 million people who use sub-post offices already have a high street bank account, in which case why would they want a basic bank account?

If anybody wants a Post Office card account, they are interrogated as to why they want one, not as if it were a matter of customer choice but as if they had to obtain permission. There is a real danger that an individual is going to say, "Oh blow that. I won't bother. I'll simply opt to have the ACTs into my bank account." Why can the customer not choose? Why have they got to be given permission? The major concern is that the important footfall of 15 million people going into sub-post offices every week will diminish.

Mr. Robathan: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Department for Work and Pensions told the chief executive of the Post Office, Mr. David Mills, that sub-postmasters were not to put up posters saying that it was still possible to receive benefits in cash?

Mr. Page: I was aware of that. It is just one of the ways in which the sub-post office customer is being forced in a particular direction. My worry is not so much the loss of income from benefits payments but the loss of footfall. The massive sum of £5.45 for each Post Office card account will be a poor means of making up the shortfall. It is small wonder that thousands of sub-

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postmasters and sub-postmistresses want out. I blame the Government for having created such a despondent mood in our sub-post office movement.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): My hon. Friend said that excessive numbers of sub-postmasters wanted to give up. Has he any idea how many?

Mr. Page: I have heard that it is some 3,000. We do not know whether they are the same 3,000 who are to be chopped by the Government. Let us hope that they are, in which case it will work out amicably. However, I understand that some postmasters will be forced out of business even if they want to continue, because their offices do not meet the criteria. I shall not go through the report published by Postcomm the month before last, although it raises huge concerns about the direction and success of the sub-post office movement.

The arrangements are being introduced in a rush just a few months before ACTs come into operation. Can the Minister tell us what contingency plans have been made in case something goes wrong? Does he agree that if £150 million per year is earmarked for rural post offices over the next three years, Horizon running costs are £100 million, the reinvention of the sub-post offices—Labour spin for "Let's close 3,000 sub-post offices"—will cost £70 million a year and the banks are having their arms twisted for £36 million, that comes to some £356 million a year? We shall "save" £400 million by the introduction of ACTs, so the whole exercise will produce a so-called saving of £44 million. I worry whether that is a genuine figure, and I am concerned about the loss of footfall. Our sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses will go through a very hard time.

I urge the Minister to tell every Member of Parliament in every constituency which sub-post offices are to be closed. In my constituency, 13 are scheduled and tagged as urban. Those who run them are worried; they know that they are at risk. The sooner they know their fate, the better they will be able to plan for the future.

In conclusion, the Royal Mail Group, as it now is, faces huge problems from overseas competition and from licensing arrangements that might allow competition from countries in which we cannot compete. The disaster that our post office network is experiencing has occurred because the Government have been far too slow and far too late in bringing forward their plans.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does my hon. Friend agree that the threatened closure of sub-post offices under this Labour Government is a worry for the elderly? That segment of our population relies on the post office; for many, it is the centre of their social world as well as being important for the services that it provides.

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend speaks about the effect that the loss of footfall may have on sub-post offices. As I said, it is not only that no money will be coming from transactions across the counter; they will also lose other sales as a result of the loss of footfall. If they lose that income, the sub-post offices will be at risk; and £150 million a year will not be enough for rural sub-post offices. If post offices are lost, the character of the countryside will be destroyed—never mind what will happen in urban areas. As I said at the start, the Minister is not guilty. He has a huge responsibility for the future.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask right hon. and hon. Members to bear in mind not only my advice with regard to their own contributions but their acceptance of interventions, especially from those who only recently entered the Chamber.

10.15 am

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Let me preface my remarks by agreeing with the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page): my hon. Friend the Minister is certainly not guilty. In fact, the hon. Gentleman himself may be one of the guilty men. The Conservative Government were guilty because of their signal failure to ensure that the Post Office management stood up to its responsibilities. In the Post Office, the present Government have inherited one of the most incompetent management structures in British industry. The charge that I put to my hon. Friend is that if the Government are not prepared to get a grip of the Post Office management, we will have replicated the mistakes made under the Conservatives. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) did us a service by introducing this debate. It is vital that the pressure is kept up on the Government by Parliament, and by the Government on the Post Office.

The whole of my constituency falls in that part of the world where every ward is in the most impoverished 10 per cent. of wards as allowed for by the Government and the Post Office. I was told that their criteria meant that no post office should be closed if the next nearest post office was more than half a mile distant. That provides my impoverished constituents with better facilities, but as an elderly constituent told me recently, even half a mile by zimmer frame is a long way. That may sound like a joke but it happens to be true. In impoverished urban areas, people—particularly the elderly and the vulnerable—have far less access to the motor car and the other social structures that support them. I strongly applaud the logic of giving them that extra protection.

I must ask for your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that I cannot accuse hon. Members of lying, and I would not want to, but am I allowed to accuse the Post Office of lying? That effectively is what it did in terms of its promise about the closure programme.

In my constituency or near it, five sub-post offices are not operating. Two of them have been non-operational for well over 12 months. The Post Office tells me that they are not closed but are simply not open. That is a difficult concept for my constituents to grasp. The Post Office argues that it is looking for new sub-postmasters and mistresses to operate them, but the charge against the Post Office is that it is deliberately not looking for

replacement people. Those sub-post offices have de facto become part of the closure programme. The two post offices in question are in West Gorton and Rusholme, in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

The charge is one of deliberate deception. I have put forward the name of a local business person who is anxious to take on the role of sub-postmaster in one of those sub-post offices. He has an impeccable trading record and no criminal convictions, but the Post Office will not take him on, saying that it does not have to give a reason. Frankly, the Post Office should give its reasons for including a post office in its closure programme—albeit by subterfuge—if there is a business to be run and someone willing to take the commercial risk of investing in it.

More worrying are the cases of the Clayton Bridge and Oldham Road sub-post offices, which recently closed. In Oldham Road's case, the lease ran out—the Post Office presumably did not know that it was going to, even though the position must have been clear from the legal documents for many years. The post office was closed even though the decision was disputed. My local council says that Oldham Road was more than half a mile from the nearest facility, but the Post Office claims that it was only 0.4 miles away. The dispute could be resolved by running a pedometer along the road to find out who is right. The Clayton Bridge post office, in the Newton Heath ward was, by the Post Office's own account, 0.7 miles from the nearest facility. The Post Office told me, however, that both post offices would have closed anyway because of circumstances beyond its control—the expiry of Oldham Road's lease and the lack of co-operation on the part of the sub-postmaster at Clayton Bridge.

The Post Office's decisions are undermining the promise that the Minister made in good faith in Parliament. That is why I must make accusations in this Chamber about deception and lying on the part of the Post Office's most senior management. I look to him to take the Post Office firmly by the throat and to squeeze until those responsible begin to tell the truth and to operate in a manner consistent with his undertakings to the House. The Post Office owes that to him and to my constituents.

10.21 am

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on securing this debate. I also pay tribute to him for his hard work over many years in support and defence of our post office network.

There are 21 post offices in my constituency, and according to correspondence that I recently received from Consignia, 18 are classed as urban. One third of urban post offices are due to close, so by the law of averages, six of mine will go. That prospect has left many constituents deeply worried. Indeed, they are so concerned that 6,000 of them have signed my petition, which makes it clear that local post offices are at the heart of local communities and that something must be done about the closures. That worry has quickly turned to anger, however, because like me, my constituents do not believe that the case for so many closures has been made. Postwatch has said that 3,000 closures are too many and are unnecessary, and my constituents are inclined to agree.

However, it is not simply urban offices that face a problem, and there are still serious questions about the future of rural post offices in my constituency. In a letter that I received some months ago, the Post Office told me of its intention to close the post office in Dalmeny, a small village in my constituency. Betty Hardie, the local postmistress, had worked there for many years but was heading for retirement. Consignia's inability to find a replacement left the post office facing closure. The sub-postmistress has decided to stay on in the meantime while alternatives are considered. We are having to rely on individuals' determination to continue local post office services that are under serious threat because the future of the income that they generate is uncertain.

I mention Dalmeny because the blame for such circumstances falls squarely at the Government's door. The problem is that they have failed to tell Parliament, the post office industry or the public how they intend to make up the massive loss in post office revenue that will arise from ACT. I searched through the *Hansard* report of 15 October, but found no answer from the Minister. Clearly, no answer will come from the "your guide" scheme, despite the relatively successful pilot. If the Government do not provide answers on this crucial issue, they will leave the remaining urban and rural post offices with an uncertain financial future. No sane person will want to enter an industry that is so full of uncertainty. Cases such as that of Dalmeny village, whose post office faces closure because of the failure to find a replacement sub-postmaster, will become more common. I call on the Minister to take this opportunity to address that crucial point.

The briefing prepared by the regulator Postwatch last June gives an excellent background to the Government's policy to move the payments of benefits and the state pension to automatic credit transfer. On page 4 of that document, under section 5.3, it states that it is important to

"ensure benefit recipients are fully and fairly informed",

and

"that there are no hidden pressures to favour one type of account over another".

It goes on to say that

"the information presented to benefit recipients must be complete and impartial."

Postwatch clearly had concerns that pressure could be applied to those on benefit in favour of one of the options on offer, namely ACT into current or universal bank accounts. As more and more evidence comes out that customers continue to be pressured not to take up the Post Office card accounts, it is clear that those concerns were justified. I ask the Minister to take those matters seriously, as such evidence clearly goes against the recommendations of Postwatch.

It has been said many times, but it deserves to be reiterated time and again, that post offices are vital to the communities that they serve. The closure programme, veiled by the Government under the heading of regeneration, the prospect of losing six or more post offices in my constituency, and the insecurity that will remain, are frightening to me and my constituents. They must not be allowed to happen.

10.25 am

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife): I think that everyone is concerned by the impact that the review has had on communities and on sub-postmasters and mistresses, but we must accept the reality of the situation. Taking no action at all did nothing to keep down the distance between the community and the post office, nor can it guarantee that the cause of concern will be automatically removed. Some 3,500 post offices closed under the last Conservative Government. I am not suggesting that anyone is to blame for that, but those are the facts. Taking no action would mean that post offices would close in any case, so it would do nothing about the distance that the elderly and others have to travel back and forth. Cleary, then, action has to be taken.

The history leading up to today's debate and the way in which some matters have been handled have not been helpful. However, I think that the Minister is not to blame in that regard, and that the Government are doing everything they can to address a complex issue. I, too, have concerns on communication, and hope that increasing efforts will be made to convey the scale of the challenge that lies ahead. We cannot overlook the fact that the post office network is the largest retailing network in the UK, and it must be handled as a serious business if it is to play a part in providing services in our communities. I think that it is better to have a planned rather than a reactive way forward. We must of course get approval for some of the measures that the Government want on remuneration and reinvestment for those post offices that wish to remain in the system.

Clearly no one wants post offices in their constituency to go. As was said earlier, however, without the custom coming through the doors, post offices will inevitably close. It is far better to structure the way ahead rather than simply to react.

10.27 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on securing the debate and apologise to him for not having been present at the start.

Without arguing about how we got into the present situation, and understanding that many throughout the country are relying on him to find the way out of it, I urge the Minister to look at the debate in the round. The new powers that Government have given the regulator in respect of post office services must be examined. Can the Minister assure me that he will consider carefully the possibility that the regulator will seek to bring greater controls in exchange for the proposal to increase the price of a first-class stamp? That could have a real bearing on the rest of the post office network and is important to today's debate.

As someone who represents a constituency that is both urban and rural, I am anxious to ensure that the £15 million for the urban network should be readily available. I remind the Minister that there is a letter from me in his in tray on his desk that asks whether some flexibility could be given to the way in which the Government determine which of the most deprived constituencies should benefit from that £15 million. In my constituency, there are many wards that fall within the 15 per cent. of the most deprived areas. The Government should show some flexibility in that respect. Many of those wards have parts that fall within the 10 per cent. most deprived, so we should be entitled to some of the £15 million that is going to help the urban network.

If the Minister could give me that assurance, I am sure that Mr. John Morris, the chairman of my constituency branch of the sub-postmasters' federation, would be most heartened.

10.30 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) who, not only today but over the past five years, has kept this issue under discussion, through his Select Committee work and in repeated debates. He has reminded us constantly that there is a clock ticking for this process.

We have had many debates on the subject, so I do not want to go over again how we got where we are and who is to blame for it. I simply want to pose a series of questions to the Minister, because I am unclear in my mind about how the process will work. The central issue, as it has always been, is how the £450 million of income to the Post Office will be replaced. Frankly, I do not think that we are any the wiser about that than we were two years ago when the performance and innovation unit report was introduced.

We had a full debate on the urban regeneration programme on Opposition day a few days ago, but some issues were not resolved. What happens if, as now seems increasingly likely, there are far more urban post offices trying to close than there is compensation for? The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) hit the nail on the head when he referred to the odd phenomenon of post offices that are neither closed nor open. I suspect that we shall have a lot of post offices in that position. What happens if 5,000 of the 9,000 want to close? I believe that that is the ratio in some of the big cities. Will 3,000 be compensated while the others are left in limbo, or will the compensation money be spread more thinly? How will the rationing process be handled? Again, we must ask why there is a cap.

I would also like to know how the appeals process will work. Again, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central hit the nail on the head when he suggested that half a mile is a long way for someone with a zimmer frame. It is also a long way if there is no bus route or there is a steep hill. My experience of Post Office Counters Ltd. management is that it is often appalling and totally insensitive to the needs of local communities and local entrepreneurs. I cannot understand how the appeals process will be managed.

Postwatch is to handle the process, and so far it has done well, but with only three or four appeals at a time. How will it handle 1,000 or 2,000 appeals? What are the mechanics of that? Can the Minister reassure us that there will be a proper case-by-case investigation when local communities are deeply unhappy with the closure process? Where are the resources that would allow the process to happen speedily and thoroughly?

Mr. Tyler: I have a local example. In my constituency, the Post Office has said that the distance to the nearest

post office is four and a half miles and that it is undulating. For a pensioner without a car, the information that the route is undulating will not be helpful.

Dr. Cable: My hon. Friend is right. Even in urban areas where the distances are smaller, many of the same problems of access apply, so a process must be in place to consider the closures carefully.

On the rural programme, we have had a leak relating to the social transfer, which is a subsidy or payment of some description of £400 million to keep the rural post office network intact over the next few years. That is welcome. However, the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) has already asked how we can be sure that the money goes where it is supposed to go. If it is a general payment to Post Office Counters Ltd. or Consignia—the Post Office—how do we know that it will meet its purpose? Even if the money is designated for the rural network, what will happen? Will individual sub-postmasters apply for it and receive a payment based on their turnover? Must they submit an individual business plan against which payment may be made? We know that there is poor take-up of the investment programme for rural post offices. How will the large programme be managed? I ask that because there is a massive lack of certainty about, and confidence in, the network, and confidence will not recover unless people understand how the payment flows will work.

Several hon. Members said that we know from anecdotes and people to whom we talk that people are either actively discouraged from using Post Office card accounts or are simply not told about them. The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters produced a leaflet but was told that it was not possible to use it. The initial reason given was that Post Office management would not allow it. I checked that with the Post Office and it was adamant that the Government, rather than it, imposed a ban on advertising. I hope that the Minister will confirm that, although I appreciate that it was not his Department but the Department for Work and Pensions that forcefully said that Post Office business could not be promoted through card accounts. We must be clear about what is happening in the Government.

Can we get a bit closer to the arithmetic? The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire said that a Post Office card account costs about £5, although I do not know where that figure has come from.

Mr. Page: It costs £5.45.

Dr. Cable: If we gross up that figure to 15 million customers, it amounts to £80 million, which is the amount that it would cost the Department for Work and Pensions to equip every user of the network with a Post Office card account. In order to save the Department for Work and Pensions £80 million a year, the Department of Trade and Industry is providing subsidies of £400 million to the rural network and compensation of £450 million to the urban network. The whole thing is completely insane. We might be working with the wrong numbers, which the Minister can clarify, but we can see that peculiar economic arithmetic that does not add up is being used. Will he explain, precisely, the savings made by not using Post Office card accounts more widely?

My final point is very simple and returns to one of the main themes of our debate in the House two to three weeks ago. We were then aware of the termination of the "your guide" system, although I do not want to go over the rights and wrongs of that again. The Minister took a positive stance and said that he had not abandoned the principle of post offices continuing to offer a general practitioner service, although that would not happen through the "your guide" mechanism. Will he spell out what the general practitioner service will involve, and tell us whether the Government will support that financially? We have lost a main mechanism, but that might not be the end of the story. What will the Government put in its place?

10.38 am

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on securing the debate. That is not just a normal courtesy of the House; the debate has shown that cross-party concern exists about the future of the post office network. Indeed, there is increasing worry about whether the network has a future.

Since the Government came to power in 1997, they have had no clear policy on the Post Office, which was illustrated well by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page). In 1997, the Post Office was making a profit, but Consignia is now losing £1.2 million per trading day. How long is that sustainable? I understand that the company is supported by Government bonds from past Post Office profits, but how long can that go on?

We have heard, and we recognise, that the post office has a special place in the hearts of people in this country. That is a fair comment about which I doubt that there is any dispute. I received a letter yesterday from an 87-year-old pensioner who lives in Essex. He told me that he is practically housebound and that, although he can reach his current post office, it is under threat of closure. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter, this is his perception. He says:

"What am I, and thousands or millions in similar circumstances, to do?"

Age Concern has written to us all to say that, for the elderly in particular, there is a special place for post offices. I understand that the Post Office has a slogan saying that they are "an essential part of everyday life".

The Conservative party has been running a "save our post offices" campaign and we have collected thousands upon thousands of signatures. *[Laughter.]* Labour Members are laughing, but last year 547 post offices closed and I think that I am right in saying that only some 200 closed between 1990 and 1997. The situation is rather different now.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman's figures are somewhat inaccurate. In 1991-92, well over 400 post offices closed.

Mr. Robathan: However, over the period, the average figure was 200. I notice that the Minister does not deny that 547 post offices closed last year.

Mr. Timms: I am happy to deny that, because the figure was substantially lower. I think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to an earlier year.

Mr. Robathan: The figures that I am looking at are for 2001, and I think that we are still in 2002—but never mind. Let us not get bogged down.

Mr. Page: The figures released are for 2001 and they show that 547 post offices closed. Those figures were released by what is now called the Royal Mail Group. In the years to which my hon. Friend and the Minister referred, there was a planned closure programme in which various sub-post offices were offered the chance of voluntary closure.

Mr. Robathan: I will let the Minister respond to these points in his speech. The figures have come from the Royal Mail Group and the Minister must address why it may have got them wrong—although I doubt that it has.

In my constituency—as, I suspect, in everybody else's—post offices have been closing. That has been happening with alacrity over the past five years. I can think of examples in Swinford, where I used to live, Claybrooke and Enderby St. Johns. Rural areas often have similar needs to those in urban areas. We have heard about a lack of transport in urban areas, but in rural areas there is often something like one bus a week. To use new Labour terms, poverty, exclusion and deprivation exist in rural areas as well.

Postcomm's report last year said:

"The services offered by Post Offices branches are particularly important for certain vulnerable groups in rural and in urban deprived areas, who are more affected by closures than other members of society."

When a post office closes, it leaves a hole in the community, so what are the Government doing? In June 2000, the PIU reported and the Prime Minister famously said:

"I welcome this report which the government fully accepts."

Postwatch's annual report for this year says that the slow progress has been very disappointing. Since the PIU's 2000 report, about 1,000 further post offices have closed.

I would like to consider three aspects of the network, beginning with the urban network. Only last month we discussed urban reinvention. We are told that some 3,000 sub-postmasters definitely wish to give up. That is quite neat, because the Government propose, with the Post Office, that perhaps some 3,000 post offices will be closed. Furthermore, approximately a third of sub-postmasters expressed an interest in giving up. It therefore seems as if half the remaining post offices will remain under threat. I hope that we will hear further details from the Minister.

The Postwatch annual report says that sub-postmasters have become increasingly desperate as rumour has fed rumour. Postwatch wants to know whether it will be given sufficient time for consultation on each proposed closure.

Secondly, I would like to consider urban deprived areas and, specifically, the post office fund for urban deprived areas. Sadly for the Post Office, this comes under the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. On 15 October, its website said:

"It is expected that the fund will become operational in Summer 2002.

Further details when available will be posted on this page."

After I raised the issue, the website changed. It now says:

"The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is seeking to launch the scheme in the Autumn of 2002."

I am not quite sure how long the autumn goes on for, but it continues:

"The proposed scheme will seek to contribute to the regeneration . . . it is expected to support."

It is all very well having a wish list, but sub-postmasters and people living in urban deprived areas want to see some Government action on this. Perhaps the Minister can tell me when the autumn ends and when that will happen.

Thirdly, there is the rural network. We have heard of the large sums of money that are likely to support rural post offices over the next three years. I am sure that that will be welcomed by all rural post offices. At DTI questions last Thursday the Minister said that the announcement would be made shortly. When will that be? What are the details? Most fundamentally, what happens after all the money has been spent over the next three years?

The Government will take away on average a third of a postmaster's income when the universal bank comes into operation in April. What will be the interest rate for the current card account? How many inquiries have there been? How many accounts does the Minister expect? Will it be only 3 million, or will more be allowed? After all, 1 April 2003 is less than five months away. What is the response of the public to the bullying announcement that they will no longer be able to receive cash if the Government have their way?

We have heard before about the 20 steps that it takes to open a Post Office card account, as opposed to the one that it takes to have money paid into a current account at a bank. The card account will also not have a CAT standard. Indeed, in response to a parliamentary question that I tabled recently, the Minister said:

"The Government has no plans to produce a CAT standard for the Post Office card account. The card account is the only account of its type, quite distinct from current accounts and basic bank accounts." [Official Report, 31 October 2002; Vol. 391, c953W.]

The Government will apply that standard to basic bank accounts and yet it cannot apply to the Government-sponsored account. It seems perverse that the account will not measure up to the Government's standards on charges, access and terms. Furthermore, the Secretary of State said that CAT standards would help to combat financial exclusion. A City source was quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* last week as saying:

"The Universal Bank account will not be eligible for the CAT standard. It does not provide any of the basic facilities. This must be a huge embarrassment to the Government."

I do not want to detain the Chamber too long, although there is much more to be said about this. All I would say is that the Government's behaviour has added to the confusion and uncertainty and the feeling that they have been dithering over the Post Office for five and a half years. There is a lack of support across the Government. The Department for Work and Pensions refuses to support the DTI on "your guide" or indeed on the concept of the universal bank and support for the Post Office in general. There is a lack of joined-up government. The executive summary of the PIU report referred to new lines of business. I will name three of them; e-commerce; one-stop shops for Government information transaction; internet learning and access. None is coming forward.

We understand why sub-postmasters want to give up. They look to the future and see no plans for a sustainable commercial livelihood. The Government are

taking away one third or more of their incomes from benefits payments. What will replace that? The National Federation of Sub-postmasters speaks for most, although not all of the small business men who run our sub-post offices. In a briefing it sent last month it said:

"It is now over two years since the publication of the PIU's report... During this period, sub post offices have continued to close at an alarming rate, morale throughout the network is at an all-time low... Of the 24 recommendations made by the Cabinet Office's PIU, very few have been implemented, funding has not been delivered... the timescales for implementation of recommendations have slipped further; the development of new roles for subpostmasters has ground to a halt; and there is widespread stagnation and inactivity across a wide range of the recommendations."

That deserves an answer, as does the following resolution passed at the federation's conference on 15 October:

"That this conference demands Her Majesty's Government to take immediate action to avert the collapse of the nationwide network of post offices."

The Government have not responded to that, as far as I know. At the moment, we see fog in the future, which I fear may conceal impending chaos and further closure.

We have heard today, from hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber, about the mess over which this Government are presiding. The Government are responsible for the situation. What will they do about it?

10.49 am

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on securing this debate. He has long played an important role in social security matters as Chairman of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions and in many other matters as well. The debate will make a useful contribution to the discussion.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) rightly reminded us that Consignia is no more. As of yesterday, we may speak of the Royal Mail Group, which faces very tough challenges. It needs to respond to the changing demands of its customers, to wider changes in society, and to the impact and opportunities arising from new technology.

The post office network provides a vital local service. It serves some 28 million people every week, and is the largest retail network, not just in the United Kingdom, as my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) rightly said, but in Europe. It includes half as many branches again as all the banks and building societies put together.

However, people are not using their local post offices as much as they used to. Some 42 per cent. of benefit recipients now access their benefit payments via bank accounts rather than by order books, compared with 26 per cent. in 1996. Over the past five years, the number of retirement pensions and widow's benefit payments paid by order books and giros has decreased by more than 1 million, from slightly more than 6 million to less than 5 million, even though the total number of pension recipients has risen by more than 1 million. Incapacity benefit payments at the post office have fallen even more dramatically, from more than 2.5 million to less than 1 million. Similarly, over the past five years, Girobank transactions at post offices have fallen by 37 per cent., as has the number of stamps sold.

The post office network must adapt to changing lifestyles, changes in people's preferences and new ways of doing business. Last year, the Post Office's operations overall lost £1.2 million per working day. The ability of sub-postmasters to sell on their businesses—the way in which people have moved on in the past—has taken a very severe knock.

There is a clear need for change in the post office network. That is why the Prime Minister asked the Cabinet Office's performance and innovation unit to develop the strategy for modernising the network about which we have heard. It made 24 recommendations, all of which the Government accepted.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire asked me particularly about the annual report. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State keeps the Prime Minister regularly informed of progress on the matter. However, Postcomm will publish an annual report on the state of the post office network, which contains the updates to which he referred.

We have been able to implement all those recommendations only because the Government have made the biggest ever investment in the Post Office—nearly £500 million—on modern online computer systems for every post office in the country.

We are making good progress on preparations to introduce the universal bank from next April. The ambition is to build on the uniquely trusted ground that the Post Office has, and to modernise and extend its commercial banking arrangements so that it becomes the nation's leading provider of access to bank accounts—the universal bank. That is our ambition for the post office network.

All the high street banks have now signed up to deliver their part of the plan. There are two strands to universal banking: first, full access at any post office, anywhere in the country, to the basic bank accounts that will, from next year, be offered by every major bank and building society. Currently, those institutions, between them, account for 99 per cent. of all the current accounts in the country, and they will offer new, basic bank accounts that will be fully accessible at any post office. The second strand is the Post Office card account, which will be solely for benefit recipients. They will be able to use it only at a post office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) asked about the literature issued by Inland Revenue and the lack of reference in it to the Post Office card account. Sub-postmasters have expressed several concerns about that. My impression is that people are happy with the literature issued by the Department for Work and Pensions, but less so with the Inland Revenue literature. When I examined that literature, however, I noted references to the Post Office card account—exactly on a par with references to basic bank accounts. If hon. Members wish to draw my attention to further concerns about the literature, I shall be happy to examine it further. However, I would encourage them to read the literature closely: if they do,

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

they will find that the Post Office card account is dealt with exactly on a par with the basic bank account, as I said.

Linda Gilroy: The main point on which assurance is required is that the Post Office card accounts will be treated on a level playing field. I assume that my hon. Friend wants that, too.

Mr. Timms: I can assure my hon. Friend that that is exactly the Government's intention. Both accounts will be introduced from April next year, when the migration to automated credit transfer will begin. Card readers and PIN pads are being rolled out across the whole network. The work is ahead of schedule, with 40 per cent. of post offices, including both post offices in the House of Commons, already equipped. So Members can see them for themselves.

The emphasis of the migration and marketing strategy will be to ensure that each customer has the best account for his or her circumstances. No eligibility requirements will apply and—to answer a couple of hon. Members' questions—no cap will be placed on numbers. Customers will choose the most suitable account for their circumstances. The package also represents a good deal for sub-postmasters, who will be paid for providing banking services to a wide range of customers, not just to benefit recipients. We can look forward to many more customers entering post offices to access bank accounts, which will provide the potential for substantial new business based on developing the post office network as the universal bank.

Conservative Members asked about the number of closures. Last year—in 2001–02—262 post offices closed. The significantly higher figure referred to was for the previous year. It reduced so sharply because of the changes introduced by the Government, particularly the assurance that no avoidable closures of rural offices would be allowed. I am pleased to say that the falling trend in post office closures has been maintained into the first six months of the current year—127 closures up to September. The trend is falling, though more undoubtedly needs to be done.

We debated the urban network on a Government motion—not an Opposition motion—in the House on 15 October. I welcome what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said. It remains the case that too little business exists for the number of post offices in urban areas, but we want to ensure that postmasters who want to leave are able to do so with dignity. Of just more than 9,000 urban post offices, more than one in eight has 10 or more other branches within a mile, and 155 offices have 15 or more such branches within a mile. For reasons that I have outlined, the volume of business is insufficient to support so dense a network. We must restore the urban network to commercial viability, restoring also the confidence of the sub-postmasters. That is critical if we are to attract much-needed new investment into the network.

In some parts of the country, Liberal Democrat representatives have started campaigning against the closure of post offices that are not going to close. I listened with interest to what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) said about that. No doubt as we speak, his party is, in its finest traditions, writing "Focus" leaflets attempting to claim credit for saving those post offices. That activity is presented as being in support of the post offices concerned, but in reality nothing is more likely to undermine a successful business than telling people that it is threatened with closure, so I hope that we will not see that. I was not aware of the Conservative party's "Save our Post Offices" campaign, but I look forward to hearing more about that, too.

To conclude, much change is needed in the post office network, but the Government are putting in place measures to make that succeed.

Cyprus

11 am

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I shall begin by declaring an interest, in that I have just returned from a visit to Cyprus as Labour vice-chair of the Friends of Cyprus with a delegation. The Cyprus House of Representatives met our expenses. We also visited the Morphou rally, for which the Barnet Friends of Morphou and the Morphou municipality met our expenses.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe on his well-deserved promotion. I look forward to working with him on this issue. It is rather strange for me to be making a speech about Cyprus in English; usually I speak about it in Greek, so I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I lapse into the demotic.

Our debate could not be more timely: a series of factors are coming together to create probably the best and the last window of opportunity for a settlement for a very long time. Failure this time would be extremely serious. At long last, the European Union accession process is acting as a catalyst to try to concentrate people's minds, particularly those of the Turkish Cypriots. The Copenhagen summit takes place on 12 December and, if all goes to plan, the accession treaty will probably be signed in April. There have been elections for a new Government in Turkey, and the United Nations is likely to launch a new plan, probably in a matter of days, through the UN special representative, Mr. Alvaro de Soto. I met him in Cyprus and found him to be a very impressive diplomat.

The Greek Cypriot presidential elections are scheduled for February, so that is also part of the time frame in which we are working. Once we get beyond the Copenhagen summit, the opportunity for manoeuvre will become increasingly restricted, because of those elections and the April accession treaty process. I believe that the Greek Cypriot elections could be postponed if a settlement framework were in place and the Cypriot National Council agreed. This is the last term for Mr. Clerides, and I am sure that he would like to go out having seen a settlement of the Cypriot problem, which has bedevilled his life in politics for so long.

One cannot talk about Cyprus without coming to the situation in Turkey, which I know is of particular interest to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Turkish EU accession process is extremely important, and there were three major developments in the summer, with the changes in Turkish law to allow for minority rights, the end of the death penalty and press liberalisation. We will have to see how those changes work out in practice.

The Turks have in the past used Cyprus as a pawn in their negotiations with the EU. Indeed, there has been great brinkmanship over these issues, including at Helsinki. With the old Government in Ankara, that brinkmanship continued as part of the lead-up to Copenhagen. The Ecevit Government somewhat overplayed their demands, as far as the domestic audience was concerned, in asking for a date for accession talks to begin. Even setting a date for a date will be difficult. That raises the question of how much progress has been made on the Helsinki track.

At the weekend, we saw the success of the Justice and Development party—the AKP—in the Turkish elections. I thought that that significant development was possible after my visit to Turkey three years ago, when the elite of the Turkish political system seemed disconnected from the population at large. One could envisage an Islamic party—not the fundamentalist sort, but one such as the AKP—coming forward. The AKP is not part of the musical chairs that has dominated Turkish politics for so long, so the fact that it has, I think, achieved an outright majority gives a signal for, I hope, some progress. The AKP party has signalled a strong pro-European stance, and it is significant that Mr. Erdogan, the leader of the AKP, has said that his first overseas visit will be to meet the Greek Prime Minister, Mr. Simitis. That is a welcome trend.

I hope that the new Government in Turkey will be reformist on human rights issues, not least over the party's own leader, Mr. Erdogan, who is barred from being a Member of the Turkish Parliament because of a poem he read out several years ago. Inevitably, the AKP will need to keep one eye looking over its shoulder at the army, whose role is always a factor in Turkish politics, as it sees itself as the defender of Kemalism and the secular state.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Does my hon. Friend accept that there are some concerns about the Islamist element within the AKP? There also appears to be something of a vacuum over who the Prime Minister of the AKP Government will be.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There is clearly a vacuum now, although I hope that the early statements made indicate how the AKP is to develop. We will have to wait to see to what extent the Muslim aspect of the party's background plays a role in policy development, but it has tried to make it clear that it does not see itself as a Muslim party but as the equivalent, perhaps, of the Christian Democrat parties in the European Union.

As I understand it, the AKP has not so far made any public statement of its position on Cyprus. That is probably a good sign, because it suggests that it might not be carrying some of the baggage of the Ecevit Government, which has made development so difficult. There is a clear indication of a desire for settlement across the island. Among the Greek Cypriots, President Clerides' Government have shown great flexibility. They see the prize as demilitarisation of the island, with an end to the unpopular policy of universal conscription, and the peace dividend, which would avoid using so much of the island's resources to pay for armaments. They want an end to the long-term tensions and instability on the island, which have, from time to time, flared up into incidents on the green line.

Above all, the difficulty is the changing demography of north Cyprus. I am sure that the Greek Cypriots are very concerned about that. They do not want Turkey as their neighbour to the north, but the Turkish Cypriots.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): As the hon. Gentleman knows I have been a long-standing friend of Cyprus, as has he. Does he agree that one of the most positive things reported in the western coverage of the Turkish elections during the past few days has been that, for the first time, more than 80 Turkish Cypriot

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

organisations are protesting openly about the military occupation of the illegally occupied zone in north Cyprus and about the settlers from Anatolia?

Mr. Dismore: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I shall return to that shortly.

We now see a real desire for settlement among the Turkish Cypriots, too. They are now, again for reasons of demography as much as anything else, possibly a minority in their own land. When their young people go to study overseas, they stay away because they see no future for themselves in Cyprus. Many Turkish Cypriots are now applying for Republic of Cyprus passports, even though that is illegal under the Denktash regime, with a view to emigration. There are now more Turkish Cypriots in London than in Cyprus. The economy is desperate, with the bank failures of the past couple of years. If anyone has anything to gain from the European Union, it is the Turkish Cypriot community.

That is reflected in the support for the opposition to which the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) just referred. It is significant that support comes from not only Turkish Cypriots but some Turkish settlers, who see their own futures likely to be blighted by what is going on in occupied Cyprus. That is evidenced by the Opposition parties' very good showing. For once, they were able to co-operate in the local elections, in which they won all the major prizes earlier this year. However, the problem remains that the Opposition in northern Cyprus is fragmented, which is unhelpful in trying to achieve a settlement.

It is fair to say that the Denktash regime is under much pressure. It is embattled, and does not seem to be acting in the interests of its people. As a result, it is increasingly resorting to oppression, including the jailing of journalists such as Shener Levent, whom I had the opportunity of meeting while I was in Cyprus. There is a rumour going round diplomatic circles that he tried to get himself jailed on purpose. He absolutely refutes that allegation, and also says that there are far easier ways of getting jailed than what happened to him. His newspaper, *Evropa*, was firebombed twice. Increasingly military courts are used for political oppression, with opponents of the regime like Izzet Izcan and Oskar Osgur facing many trials during the next few months.

While we were in Cyprus, 15 Spanish journalists were in the north, visiting the editor of *Kibris*, the Denktash-supporting newspaper. While they were attending a lecture on press freedom, representatives of the Turkish Cypriot Administration turned up and ordered them to leave the north immediately under pain of arrest. We have to make it absolutely clear to the Denktash regime that that sort of behaviour is not just unhelpful, but downright unacceptable.

The harassment and prevention of bi-communal contact on the island by the Denktash regime is extremely serious. It is bizarre that business people can only meet off the island to discuss common interests. Only last week, representatives of seven Cypriot trade unions were prevented from attending the fourth trade union forum on the island at the Ledra palace. Mr. Denktash has indicated his hostility towards the European Union, refusing to meet the EU ambassador, Mr. Van der Meer, who is extremely frustrated by his position. It is no wonder that when I talk to Turkish Cypriots, they tell me that they are under occupation every bit as much as the Greek Cypriot people. The regime works against the interest of its people.

The United Nations process has moved on. It is a difficult one, but two technical committees have been half established. One is considering the continuity of legislation after settlement, the other is considering the question of international treaties. The Greek Cypriots have already started work. They are ready, and their work is advanced. The Turkish Cypriots have yet to nominate their representatives to those committees. We were told that that would happen when Mr. Ergin Olgun, Mr. Denktash's chief of staff, returned from New York where he has been with Mr. Denktash, who is recovering from a recent operation. However, that still has not taken place.

I take comfort from the assurances given by Mr. Hakki Muftazade, that in the absence of Mr. Denktash someone else will have to conduct the negotiations if the worst comes to the worst. I am concerned that the suggestion of a third committee was not accepted by the Turkish Cypriots. It would probably have been the most important, as it would deal with the effects on individuals, bearing in mind the need for the approval of any solution by both communities in a referendum. The UN plan and discussions have been conducted under a news blackout. It is important that that continues, although it inevitably leads to press speculation, leaks and great difficulties in preparing the respective communities for the outcome of the negotiations. It is important that the UN process produces a package as a whole, with good and bad for both sides. It must not be presented as a take-it-or-leave-it plan to the two communities. They must have the opportunity to discuss their concerns. Far too often, we have seen take-it-or-leave-it plans introduced, particularly by the Turkish Cypriots, which have simply led to discussions running into the ground.

The plan must not be technocratic. It cannot work on the basis of splitting the difference between the two communities. We have to recognise that the Denktash regime is a rejectionist regime, whereas the Government of President Clerides has indicated great flexibility and a willingness to make concessions. We must recognise that both sides have to accept the settlement in a referendum, and each community will have to vote.

I think that it is fair to say that Turkish Cypriots would accept virtually any UN plan to alleviate their position if they were given a chance to do so. However, there is a risk, if the plan is not acceptable to the Greek Cypriots, of a rejectionist faction of Turkish Cypriots exploiting that for its own ends. We were questioned quite firmly by some who suggested that if the Turkish Cypriots voted yes, and the Greek Cypriots voted no, it would effectively mean that the EU should not let them in, thus creating through the back door the linkage that has been rejected on so many occasions in the past.

We must recognise that Greek Cypriots would see further compromise as painful. Many believe, particularly in the diaspora in the UK, that too much has been conceded already. The plan has to recognise the sensibilities of the dispossessed, the vigorous democracy that is Greek Cypriot political life, and the

sacrifices that they believe they have already made. The UN plan must be fair and just. It must recognise human rights and abide by UN resolutions: the bi-communal, bi-zonal federation plan and the framework set out in the high-level agreements of 1977 and 1979. It must provide security for both communities, as well as demilitarisation. That will inevitably involve the presence of small detachments of the Greek and Turkish armies. One of the outstanding questions—I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can answer it—is whether those detachments will form part of the international security force under international command or act under their respective national commands. If possible, the former would be far preferable.

Turkish Cypriots have expressed concerns about the nature of the state and have become hung up on the question of two states. We should remember that the state of Cyprus was created in 1960 after decolonisation. The republic of Cyprus joined the UN and the Commonwealth and started the European Union accession process. That state must not be succeeded in international law, but continue as it is in relation to the outside world. It would be absurd to suggest otherwise, so that Cyprus had to reapply to join the UN, the Commonwealth, the EU and all the international treaties and obligations to which it is party. However, any settlement will inevitably involve changes to internal state arrangements to reflect the bi-zonality that must be its essence, in that it will be necessary to decide which functions of the state are federal and which are devolved to the two communities. In that connection, we must consider the electoral system and whether cross-voting will be possible. Without cross-voting, there is a risk that rejectionists on both sides could create problems, as we have seen in Northern Ireland.

The UN third committee, which was not established having been vetoed by the Denktash regime, was probably the most crucial in relation to issues that touch people's lives. It was intended to consider property rights and the boundaries between the two zones. Any settlement must be based on individual property rights. It must recognise the rights of refugees, not retrospectively permit what is now euphemistically called ethnic cleansing. It must provide freedom of movement around the island.

In relation to property rights, we must consider where the new boundary between the zones will be. Clearly, it must be north of Morphou and Famagusta. The right to return must make provision for refugees from Kyrenia. At least in the short term, freedom of movement is a way of making progress in that regard. There must be compensation for losses—that is a live international legal issue, as we have seen in the Loizidou case—but equally there must be recognition of the investment that has taken place over the past 28 years. If someone has spent considerable sums of money building on a bare plot of land, the settlement must recognise that additional property right. The way forward is to offer a variety of options to try to provide for as many eventualities and choices as possible. Ultimately, the rightful owner of a piece of land or home should be able to decide what they want to happen.

The issue of Turkish settlers is problematic. They, too, have human rights that must be recognised. It would be wrong if they were to be forcefully dispossessed from homes where they have lived for some time, with nowhere else to go. It might be possible to provide them with ample funds to return to Turkey and resettle there or to give them limited residence rights in the Turkish Cypriot zone. Some pointers might be provided by what happened in the Baltic states in relation to the Russians who settled there. There may be a case for limited citizenship—for example, for those who married Turkish Cypriots or speak Greek or English as other languages.

Many serious practicalities will be involved in achieving a settlement. People will have to be moved before a territorial adjustment can take place. Millions of mines will have to be removed, which will take many years. Some of the abandoned buildings, especially in Varosha, are in a terrible condition. It will be necessary to rebuild the infrastructure; the Americans have signalled that they are willing to help with that. Another difficulty is the healing process. A Cypriot-style truth and reconciliation commission might be a way forward. There is undoubtedly a case for letting relatives know about the fate of missing persons. Without progress on that, the situation will be very difficult.

Mr. Love: Does my hon. Friend agree that a good start in confidence-building would be a readjustment of the green line to take into account Varosha and some of the other areas that were strongly within the Greek Cypriot community prior to 1974?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an important practical point. That could happen quickly, because no one would be displaced as a result. However, a lot of money would need to be invested in Varosha given the condition of the buildings, which have been neglected for 28 years. Many of them suffered severe damage during the Turkish invasion and were never repaired.

It is important to stress that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots can live together. We know that from London: there is no green line down the middle of Green lane. At the German Cypriot forum, the Bishop of Morphou indicated a willingness to go back to Morphou, even under the Turkish Cypriots, to worship at Agios Mammas and to meet with "his brother the Imam".

I found one thing particularly touching. After the Morphou rally, I went to the United Nations open day at the Ledra Palace hotel, and while I was there I met two people from Morphou whom I had seen at the rally. They were friends. At the bi-communal event they met two Turkish Cypriots who were living in their houses in Morphou. The process was obviously painful, but they were able to discuss the matter in a sensible way and to recognise the realities of both sides. One of the Turkish Cypriots was herself a refugee from Limassol. She would like to return to her home, should a settlement permit that.

The fact that people are coming to terms with extremely difficult situations and can talk in a civilised way to the very people who they may perceive as having deprived them of their homes, provides great hope for the future. People are speaking as a result of bi-communal contact, however hard it is and however difficult Mr. Denktash may make it. The politicians on the island, and Mr. Denktash in particular, must allow these contacts to flourish. They must allow all the people

[Mr. Dismore]

of Cyprus—Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots and all the minorities—to live together in peace, security, justice and democracy, with respect for the human rights of all who live on the island.

11.21 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I also declare an interest. Together with the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), I travelled to Morphou recently. That was facilitated by the House of Representatives in Cyprus and by the municipality of Morphou. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing a debate on an important subject at a key time.

Nobody present needs a lesson in Cypriot history. Many hon. Members know the island even better than I do, but just occasionally these debates reach a wider audience and so there are certain things that I would like to say—to remind myself, if not others.

About 15 years ago I travelled to Berlin with the excellent former Member of the European Parliament, Christopher Jackson. It was my first visit there. On a very warm summer's night at about midnight, I went to the viewing platform at the Berlin wall with my MEP. On the free side of the wall there were rabbits playing on the grass and crosses to mark where people had died. We climbed to the top of the wall. It is impossible to forget the sight. It looked like two miles before there were any lights at all. Gun tyres and bleak concrete were all that could be seen in both directions.

I hoped then that the Berlin wall would come down within my lifetime and, of course, it has. If I were to say to most people in America, in this country and in the European Union that effectively there is a Berlin wall in a free western state, they would look at me in blank amazement. However, one can go to Astromeritis and lay wreaths in memory of those who died during the invasion of that little church, and then go down the dusty track for a mile or so until reaching the barbed wire. One can meet the UN soldiers on duty, and I pay tribute to the tremendous job that they do. If one stares into the distance and sees the church of Morphou and the houses that some of the people own and would like to return to, one begins to realise what division really means.

It is a shame on this country, the European Union and the western world that the island of Cyprus has been divided since 1974. It is a shame and a disgrace that there are Turkish Cypriots—the hon. Gentleman said that there are more Turkish Cypriots living in London than are living in their own land—and Greek Cypriots, many of whom live in London, who are unable to live in their own homes or visit their own churches or the graves where their ancestors are buried. We have tolerated that for 27 years.

I ask the Minister to clarify a position and give a reassurance this morning. In the main Chamber of the House of Commons the other day, the Prime Minister made a statement following the European summit. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and I questioned him about Turkey's desire to enter the European Union, its desire to secure what has become known as a rendezvous date—a date for talks about talks—and the need to reach a settlement in Cyprus.

I confidently expected the Prime Minister to say that there could be no further progress on Turkish entry to the European Union until there had been a settlement in Cyprus. It was made plain at Helsinki that there was a pathway. We wanted it and fought for it. Many of us would like to see a free, democratic, human rights respecting and economically sound Turkey in the EU, but that cannot happen unless the prerequisite—a settlement in Cyprus—is achieved. That was made abundantly plain in Helsinki but now, without further progress, the begging bowl is out for more.

The Prime Minister clearly indicated that he did not regard a settlement in Cyprus and Turkey's progress towards inclusion in the EU as directly connected. He may not have meant to, but he gave that impression. When he summarises the debate, I would be grateful if the Minister would clarify precisely the position, because many of us and many of our friends in the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities strongly believe that the wrong signals are being sent out.

The hon. Member for Hendon—my hon. Friend, in this context—has made it clear that time is running out. Concern has been expressed that Cyprus is about to be sacrificed on the altar of expediency: the human rights of Turkish and Greek Cypriots to live in their homes and to travel where they wish without having to go through barriers and barbed wire, and the rights of the united communities to live in peace on their island and to trade where they wish on their island and beyond it, are about to be sold down the river because the United States and the United Kingdom require the use of an air base in Turkey for other fairly obvious purposes. I hope that the Minister will be able to give a clear assurance this morning that that is not the case.

We have a few short weeks, as journalists say—I am never quite sure what a short week is, as opposed to a long week. Nevertheless, there is very little time between now and Copenhagen in December in which to reach a settlement. It can be done. As mentioned earlier, two committees have been set up. However, a third must be set up, because the issues that affect real people's real lives—particularly their homes and property—must be resolved.

If a framework agreement is to be reached between now and December that allows a united island of Cyprus to join the European Union on 1 January 2004, which is what we all want, it will have to be sold to the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities in referendums. Unless those communities are confident that their fears, concerns and aspirations are being addressed, they will not vote in favour and the deal will fall. I fear that if that window of opportunity is not taken, we shall not see an agreement in Cyprus, possibly for many years.

On the positive side, we know from our visit—we visited both sides of the green line—that there are very many people of good will. We met Turkish Cypriots of good will; some brave people who are prepared to stand up to say and print what they believe. The Greek Cypriots of good will want a settlement; they are being denied it because once again politicians are getting in the way—I cannot think where we have heard that before.

Mr. Hawkins: As always, my hon. Friend is making a powerful contribution with which I entirely agree. Does

he agree that one of the greatest concerns is the continuing role of the Turkish military? The worry that many of us have, as friends of Cyprus, is that whatever the men of good will on the Turkish side of the green line may want, the Turkish military finds Cyprus too useful as a military training ground for it ever to be happy to allow it to come back under democratic control.

Mr. Gale: I shall come, briefly and in closing, to the circumstances surrounding the Turkish military and its participation in events.

I should like to say to the Minister, who I am sure has maintained his paid-up membership to the National Union of Journalists, as I have, that some of the brave people need help. Shener Levent, the editor of *Afrika* in the northern occupied part of the island, wryly said that he was likely to spend Christmas in prison. I said that I hoped he had sent his Christmas cards and written his articles before being jailed yet again for saying what is true. He has dared to say that the regime is getting in the way of what real people want—they are crying out for a settlement. Those human rights issues must be settled before Turkey can make any real progress towards the European Union. Economic issues must also be settled.

My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) referred to the Turkish military, and thus to what is known in diplomatic parlance as the deep state: the state behind the state, which runs the country no matter what the electoral process delivers. However, we have an opportunity because in the past two days, the Turkish people overwhelmingly elected a new Government. That creates a chance for the Minister and his colleagues, the emissaries of the United Nations and the United Kingdom along with Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots to move rapidly forwards, between now and Copenhagen in December, to reach the settlement that so many people so badly want. If that is not done, I do not believe that history will forgive those of us in the Chamber this morning.

11.33 am

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on securing the debate.

I declare a similar interest, having also been on the Friends of Cyprus visit to the island a couple of weeks ago. I have previously been to Cyprus, but this was my first visit as a parliamentarian. I have been interested in these matters for some years, and Birmingham has a substantial Cypriot community. As it was my first visit as a parliamentarian, I was acutely aware of the danger of returning and drawing too many conclusions from what is inevitably a snapshot picture obtained from being there for only a couple of days. With that health warning, I want to make a few observations.

The first concerns the impact of EU accession. It is absolutely right—my hon. Friend referred to this—that there should be no preconditions in the way of Cyprus's accession. However, the prospect of that accession has successfully concentrated minds on the negotiations. This is a time of great opportunity, but there is also a danger that that opportunity could be wasted. Both my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) have said that we must not let that opportunity go by and that any settlement proposals must have the confidence of the people of Cyprus and their support at the ballot box. That presents a dilemma, to which my hon. Friend and both hon. Gentlemen referred. If the negotiations are to go ahead and UN proposals are to come forward, there must be space for that to happen. That means discussions taking place in a climate that is conducive to reaching a settlement away from public view. At the end of that process, the proposals and ideas must win support. If the people of Cyprus have not felt involved in the process, it could be risky when it comes to a referendum at the end of the day.

I shall address my observations to that issue and three matters that are important to recognise if we are to ensure that people in Cyprus are confident about the future. They are practicality, identity and vision.

It was absolutely right to refer to the third committee. There are huge issues in Cyprus and the principle of property rights is vital to any settlement if it is to stick, but those matters must also have a practical application for people and make sense to them. People must understand that. Some of the discussions that we had during our visit suggest that the ways in which to achieve that may not be as difficult as they appear to be at first sight. That will be realised only if the work is done now to ensure that the details of the way in which people may be affected by the settlement are sorted out so that when the package is available it makes sense to them, they can see how they relate to it and they can see a future for themselves and their families. That applies to people on both sides of the green line. It must make sense and that means detailed discussion on issues of practicality now, not in future.

The second matter concerns identity. As in so many conflicts, symbols are important. My recent visit to Cyprus was my first as a parliamentarian. I was simply on holiday the previous time, but one of my abiding memories was driving along the road from Larnaka to Nicosia and seeing the huge Turkish flag in the hills. Everyone on the other side of the green line saw that symbol of occupation and dispossession every day. If a settlement is to work, it is important that there is a process of coming to terms with that past and recognising that identity.

My hon. Friend referred to a Cypriot version of the truth and reconciliation commission, and it is important to understand and recognise in the settlement the reality of the occupation and dispossession. The hon. Member for North Thanet described graphically the reality of not being able to go to one's home; of knowing that it is there but not being able to reach it. I chair the all-party group on Palestine, and know the huge importance that people feel and attach to being denied the right to go to the place in which they or their parents were brought up. I am sure that that feeling is no less real in Cyprus. I am aware of the reality of checkpoints and the impact that the prevention of freedom of movement can have, and that will be no less real in Cyprus.

It is important that Turkish Cypriots and the regime come to terms with the reality of what has happened over the past 28 years. It is positive that an increasing number of Turkish Cypriots are speaking out. That is why it is unacceptable that action was taken against the likes of Izzet Izcan and Oskar Osgur and, as the hon. Member for North Thanet said, why it is particularly

[Richard Burden]

unacceptable that action continues to be taken against Shener Levent and *Afrika* for doing no more than speaking the truth.

Symbols are also important the other way round. Turkish Cypriots need to know that when we talk of a bi-zonal federation we, and everybody else, mean that in practice as well as in theory. They have to be confident that their rights will be respected. I attended an interesting meeting of people in the north who do not support the Denktash regime and want to see a settlement. However, somebody attending that meeting had his own agenda and was not interested in a settlement. He easily deflected the views and positive hopes of others, and was able to sow seeds of doubt on what the Cyprus of the future would be like. We can take two lessons from that. One is that people who have that sort of agenda need to be confronted. The other is that we need to understand that it is easy to deflect discussions and conversations, and that in order for that not to happen we need to ensure that people feel that their concerns are being addressed.

The other difficult question that needs to be taken on board is that of Turkish Cypriot identity. There are people born in Cyprus whose parents came over from Turkey, who are now adults, and who have known no life other than that on the island of Cyprus.

In order to move forward, we need not only to come to terms with the past and identity, but to have a vision of what the future can hold, which is why bi-communal activities are vital. That is why the work of the bi-communal choir, which visited Istanbul earlier this year, is so positive. It is entirely unacceptable that veiled threats, and sometimes not-so-veiled threats, from the Turkish Cypriot regime should be put in the way of people involved in bi-communal activities. As is often the case, non-governmental organisations are showing the way forward, and some 86 Turkish Cypriot NGOs are engaged in that work. Friends of Cyprus organised the visit that we made a few weeks ago, and its work in international affairs is important.

We also need to be cautious about the way in which we use language and terminology. I want particularly to refer to the difficult word "new". My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon is right that there should be no question of trying to go back by assuming or implying that the Republic of Cyprus is anything other than recognised and internationally legitimate. When some people refer to the prospect of a new Cyprus they mean casting doubt on that recognition, legitimising the occupation or ignoring what has happened over the past 28 years, but their version of newness has no place in Cyprus's future. But there still can be a new future for Cyprus that can be greater than its past. As part of the European Union, a great deal can be built out of the common heritage of Greek and Turkish Cypriot Cypriots.

We must be clear what we mean by "new", but we should not be scared of the word. I say that having met the former mayor of Famagusta, who has spent his entire adult life engaged in the politics and development of Cyprus. He knew those in the British Labour party such as Ernie Bevin and has been involved, or has known somebody who is, in virtually everything that has happened in Cyprus since the 1940s. However, when we met him, we looked out over the town that he cannot visit. It is still virtually a ghost town, a symbol of occupation.

What was encouraging about him was not only that he was acutely aware of the heritage of injustice, which he wanted to put right, but that he had a positive vision for the future. He was not hidebound by the past, nor scared of a new future for the island. If, as an international community, we are to promote a settlement based on justice, it is important for us to recognise what has happened in the past. However, we should not allow the ghost of the past to get in the way of our building a common future for Greek and Turkish Cypriots, based on existing resolutions. They should then be able to find a way forward that is new for both communities and better than anything that has happened before.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is customary to commence the first of the three winding-up speeches 30 minutes before the conclusion of the debate, which will be at noon. I am anxious that all right hon. and hon. Members should have an opportunity to express their views. I ask Members to keep their contributions concise and to be cautious about accepting interventions.

11.45 am

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I shall register an interest, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have visited Cyprus with the parliamentary Friends of Cyprus, and I am sure that I will do so again. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on having secured the debate. It is extremely timely and he showed great foresight in applying for it. We have been treated to three exceptional speeches this morning. My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) spoke passionately and insightfully about a subject on which he is recognised to be a great expert, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) spoke with deep understanding in a very thoughtful speech that raised some interesting points.

This is a good time for the debate, thanks to the perplexing Turkish election result. It could be helpful, but that remains to be seen. The new AKP Administration have given some promising early signals, which I welcome. It looks as though they want to face west and will not embrace the fundamentalist-flavour Muslim tendencies that have occasionally been unhelpful to the international community. I hope that those are good signs and that they are accurate indicators for the future. It would be helpful for the new Turkish regime if the European Union were to give positive signals back, particularly with regard to Turkey's possible accession. That would represent an offer of hope, a light at the end of the tunnel.

Turkey must feel that it has a real choice and that a future path in the EU will be hugely more beneficial than any other route that it might take to its destiny. I hope that Europe is listening carefully to the current signals and that it will respond appropriately. I am sure that the Minister and the other Front-Bench spokesmen will be discussing that.

It would be good not only for Turkey if it faced west. Not only would it help Turkey to tackle its human rights issues and get to grips with developing a true and genuine parliamentary democracy, which would give the people more prosperity. It would be extremely good also for the international community and for geopolitical stability if Turkey were to come into the bosom of Europe, which is where it should be. That is much more important than the economic factors, although they are important. Nevertheless, the total demise of the common agricultural policy may be another helpful move in allowing Turkey to make progress in that direction. However, if I progress down that track, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will call me to order.

There is a desire for settlement throughout the beautiful island of Cyprus. Of course, that settlement must be a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation with a plan for single sovereignty, and it must include ingredients such as flexibility and good will. Give and take on both sides will be needed to achieve a settlement. The Greek Cypriots could be forgiven for being rather cynical because, over previous years, we have seen Mr. Denktash and the Turkish Cypriots operating ratchet diplomacy. Rather than give and take it has been take, take and take; the Greek Cypriots are rightly cynical about that. However, although one can understand their sense of injustice, they must be prepared to approach this new window of opportunity with a fresh heart and with good will.

Mr. Denktash is about to return to Turkey after undergoing heart surgery. We must send our good wishes to him for his future health. However, if he is not well enough to move the talks forward, particularly the work of the technical committee on property and territory and so on, those talks should not be frustrated: other people must take over. For instance, funds must be made available for new building, so that settlers can be accommodated in the Turkish-occupied part of the island when, if appropriate, property is returned to its owners. We must not forget—I know that most Greek Cypriots will not forget—that the Turkish settlers, too, have human rights.

The last few weeks in the run-up to Copenhagen will see many of these issues developing quickly, so I shall not trail through them now. No doubt the Front-Bench spokesmen will clarify the position on them and on progress with the accession process. Like other hon. Members, I have friends in the business community and personal friends in Cyprus, and they give me the strong impression that the majority of Cypriots, whether Turkish or Greek, simply want a solution. They have the good will and warmth of heart to find a solution. I hope that the politicians and pressure groups will allow it to emerge, because it sometimes seems that they are standing in the way of the people. There will of course be a tremendous temptation for the rejectionists on both sides to try to score points, but I hope that that will be dismissed.

Cyprus is at the most challenging point in its recent history. The accession of Cyprus must proceed, and I believe that it will act as a catalyst to solve the problems. I do not have real faith that a solution will be found before accession, although I hope and pray that that will be the case. If it would help to make progress with the settlement, and if the settlement seemed to be on the stocks, perhaps it would be possible to delay Mr. Clerides's elections in Cyprus, so that he can make a positive contribution to the settlement, as he has always sought to do.

Finally, I call on Mr. Denktash to be open and honest on the missing persons issue. Progress on that matter would cost little to either side, and any concept of humanity and human rights demands that it should be made.

11.55 am

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on securing the debate. It is timely. I also congratulate the Minister on his promotion. He is known as a good friend to Europe and a strong supporter of enlargement.

I should declare an interest as a regular visitor to Cyprus, who takes a great interest in the island and in seeking a solution to the division.

Britain has a special relationship with Cyprus, which goes back to 1878. We have been directly involved with Cyprus ever since. Many Cypriots who live in this country came here in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, and especially in 1974, but people should not be deluded into thinking that they are not passionate about what happens on the island. A letter that I received last week will give hon. Members a flavour. It says:

> "This is not fair! I mean the Berlin Wall was taken down, why not our Green Line? We are only a small island and an even smaller nation within it. Everyone wants the island because of its strategic position."

That was written to me by a Maria Manford, who is aged 11. The issue is important to many people in this country.

I shall discuss three issues. First, in line with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), I refer to bi-communal contacts. The island has been divided for 28 years, and during that time the level of contact between the two communities has declined, as everyone would recognise. People have grown older and forgotten and a new generation has grown up within the communities, which have both changed tremendously. The Turkish Cypriot community has been isolated in that period and there has been mass immigration of Turkish people from Anatolia, which has changed the situation in the north of the island. The living standards in the republic have grown enormously, perhaps more distinctly than other changes that have occurred on the island. Therefore, inter-communal contacts are crucial.

I shall not describe all the ways in which those contacts are struggling to happen. My hon. Friend's predecessor as Minister for Europe went to the Ledra palace and spoke to both communities, so I hope that he will find an opportunity to visit the island during his tenure. Inter-communal contacts are necessary because they foster respect and, perhaps even more importantly, understanding between the two communities, and create a positive climate for the talks. The Government have a role through international communities to sponsor those contacts.

I refer briefly to the European Union negotiations. It is in the interests of both the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot communities that Cyprus enters the EU. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke about

[Mr. Andrew Love]

the Brussels summit, he confirmed that Cyprus is on course, will complete the accession process in December, will sign up in the early part of the new year and will join in 2004. The Helsinki declaration was reaffirmed at the talks. It reads:

"If no settlement has been reached by the completion of accession negotiations, the Council's decision on accession will be taken without the above being a precondition."

That is very important. It goes on to say that

"the Council will take account of all relevant factors."

Will the Minister say something about those?

Turkey has just held elections, and we will be feeling our way for a while as regards its attitude to the European Community. We clearly want it to take a positive attitude, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister confirmed in his speech that it would. We want it to make progress, but—to respond to concerns expressed by other hon. Members—it must meet the same conditions as every other candidate country if it is to join the EU. Will the Minister say a little about what those conditions are likely to be?

Many people, including many in the Cypriot community, see EU enlargement and the accession of Cyprus as a catalyst for the UN-sponsored negotiations—and, my goodness, we need one. For 28 years, we have had failed negotiation after failed negotiation. Earlier this year, the parties decided to meet face to face, and everyone took heart from the fact that they were beginning talks. However, the UN had to admit in July that progress was "glacial" and that neither party—but particularly the Turkish Cypriot representative—was moving forwards as fast as it could.

There are three steps that the Government must take to address the issue. First, it is critical that we redouble our efforts, in all the organisations in which we are involved, to bring the two communities together for talks. Secondly, we must recognise that accession can be a catalyst and that it will assist in resolving the division of the island. Thirdly, it is critical that any solution is in line with UN resolutions in the acquis communautaire, and I hope that the Minister will refer to that. That is the framework that the UN should use, and concern has been expressed in that regard. Britain should talk about that framework. It has been the framework for the past 28 years, and if we live up to its goals, we can find a solution. Cyprus will then be united, and there will be a revolution in how things are done. That will be good for both communities and for the international situation in the eastern Mediterranean.

12.2 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on securing the debate. I also congratulate those who have contributed so far to our well-informed and thoughtful discussion. There seems to be a remarkable degree of unanimity on the issue.

The Liberal Democrats fully support United Nations and international efforts to resolve the differences between the Cypriot communities. We support the UN view that a settlement must be based on a state of Cyprus that has single sovereignty, a single international personality and single citizenship. That will eventually require the formation of a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation, but such a settlement should not be reached through partition or succession.

The future of Cyprus and the shape of the final settlement can ultimately be resolved only by the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities in free and open negotiations. Any solution should be based on reconciliation and respect for the fundamental human rights of both communities. We urge both parties to participate fully and in good faith in the UN's efforts to broker a peaceful agreement.

An increase in military strength on the part of either community will be counterproductive. A controlled reduction in the amount of military equipment will be an important step in the peace process. In that regard, the UN peacekeeping mission must be free to undertake its mandate. That requires an end to the restriction that the Turkish Cypriot authorities and the Turkish military imposed on its operations. Both communities should cease provocative infringements in the UN buffer zone.

As many hon. Members have stressed, the future of Cyprus lies in the European Union. We urge the Turkish Cypriot authorities to engage with the Republic of Cyprus to prepare for accession to the EU. We hope that accession will act as a spur to reconciliation and a peaceful resolution.

Of course, however, the future of Cyprus does not lie entirely in the hands of the Cypriots. By definition, past and present relations between Greece and Turkey lie at the heart of the current division of the island. I believe that Greece's imminent presidency of the EU and Turkey's aspirations to EU membership can provide a vital catalyst to the resolution of internal and external disputes over the future of Cyprus, which could come much quicker than we might otherwise have hoped.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the recent statements by the Greek Government, supporting Turkey's accession to the European Union. At the very least, these statements remove the threat that Greece could veto an application by Turkey, which would in turn threaten to destabilise the progress that Turkey is making towards meeting the Copenhagen criteria. We hope that Turkey in turn recognises that strongly supporting the UN Secretary-General's efforts to bring about a successful and comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem should be among the very first political priorities in its accession partnership.

If Turkey's EU candidacy is to proceed, many reforms are vital. In fact, great progress has been made over the past few months through legal and constitutional changes. Above all, however, progress on Cyprus is essential. The previous Turkish Government argued that the Republic of Cyprus is legally barred from acceding to the EU. The British Government have not accepted that argument and neither have the Liberal Democrats. We can understand why, from their perspective, many Turks feel that the EU is acting unjustly and with some bias in allowing the Government of the Republic of Cyprus to apply for EU membership. The population of the Republic of Cyprus is of course almost entirely Greek Cypriot. The application excludes the participation of about 200,000 Turkish Cypriots in the north of the island.

Whether still divided or not, the Republic of Cyprus will almost inevitably be accepted as a member of the EU at the Copenhagen European Council at the end of

the year. If no settlement has been reached over Cyprus by then, it would seem that some provision will be made for the Turkish Cypriot community in the north to come under the flag of Cyprus at some future date. The newly elected Turkish Government must come to terms with that fact.

Commentators in Turkey with whom I have spoken recognise that, should Cyprus join the EU as a divided island without at least an imminent settlement, it will be a serious setback to Turkey's EU candidacy. Cyprus's entry to the EU as a divided island would be a serious setback to reform and the development of a European outlook in Turkey. There would also be a danger that, should southern Cyprus—the Republic of Cyprus—join the EU before negotiations on Turkey's accession had been opened, it would use its newly acquired veto to block Turkey's application for the foreseeable future.

There is, however, a strong feeling that a settlement may at least be reached between the Greek and Turkish communities in the near future. Both communities need to recognise the urgency of reaching a settlement in the few weeks remaining this year, which would be in the best interests of all concerned. Seen from a wider perspective, it appears that the remaining obstacles to a settlement need not be insurmountable.

There is now a strong case for Turkey's allies to engage in robust confidence-building with the Turkish establishment and the Turkish armed forces in particular, emphasising the benefits of a settlement over Cyprus. We urge the Government to work closely with the United States, in the context of Turkey's pivotal role in NATO and in the war against terrorism. We urge the Government to work closely with Germany, which has the strongest links with Turkey among the EU states. Recognising our unique and enduring links with the island, the Government must work closely with the Republic of Cyprus. There must now be a concerted and combined effort to persuade Turkish doubters of the benefits that a settlement in Cyprus would bring to Turkey, in terms of advancing its EU accession and in enhancing regional stability. If Turkey can be persuaded to trust the European Union on Cyprus, and to assist in achieving a settlement, its own prospects for EU membership can only be advanced.

With the Copenhagen summit fast approaching, the urgency of achieving a settlement in Cyprus cannot be denied. There are elections in Cyprus early next year, as other Members mentioned. Accession treaties will be signed in April 2003. There will be serious consequences for the European Union's relations with Turkey if a divided Cyprus accedes to the EU.

Turkey has a new Government with a clear mandate, which provides an opportunity that should be seized now. The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs believes that it is in the best interests of Turkey, Greece and the EU to have a settlement, and we echo that. We urge the United Kingdom, as one of the original guarantor powers for Cyprus, along with Greece and Turkey, to co-operate with Germany—Turkey's largest and most significant EU neighbour—to lead EU efforts to achieve a solution.

Failure to use that diplomatic window constructively will lead to disappointment in Turkey and problems for all member states' attempts to foster good relations with Turkey, which is of great strategic importance to the EU, NATO and the international community in general. Turkey is also, of course, a significant future member of the EU.

Failure to use the diplomatic window constructively would also severely hamper efforts to contain Saddam Hussein's ambitions in Iraq and undermine the prosecution of the war against terrorism. There is no doubt that vigorous diplomatic efforts to build reassurance and confidence in Turkey about reaching a settlement on Cyprus would bring these wider benefits.

Positive moves to reach a settlement would assist negotiations to finalise the terms under which the EU can use NATO military assets for Europe-wide operations. Those negotiations are under way, and a fresh mandate was issued to Javier Solana at the Brussels summit only last week. Delays in finalising the EU-NATO agreement are primarily due to the dispute between Greece and Turkey, and Cyprus lies at the heart of that dispute.

There can be no question that a settlement in Cyprus has a far-reaching influence on our security, defence capability and, most importantly, our European and foreign policy objectives. The Government have a prime responsibility to recognise the importance of a settlement for Cyprus to the UK's wider interests and to recognise the opportunity to take the initiative now.

12.11 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): First, I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on securing the debate and on his speech. I congratulate other hon. Members on their high-quality speeches. I also congratulate the Minister for Europe on his promotion, and I wish him well in his new role.

Cyprus is increasingly important as its application for membership of the European Union progresses. The United Kingdom has close links with that country, is not least because of our common Commonwealth membership. I congratulate Cyprus on its progress with its application to join the EU. It has led the pack of accession countries in closing the chapters, which is a tribute to the quality, hard work and determination of its Government. We warmly welcome Cyprus's prospective membership, and we look forward to working with it inside the EU. Cyprus, with its location in the eastern Mediterranean, will undoubtedly be an increasingly valuable and important link between Europe and the middle east.

We have had a special relationship with Cyprus for a long time. The UK has been greatly involved in the life of Cyprus, and the involvement and links remain. The UK has a thriving and successful Cypriot community—both Greek and Turkish—that enriches our national life with its customs, culture and enterprise. Cyprus is very close to our hearts.

The UK retains two sovereign military bases in Cyprus, and it is one of the state's three guarantors. We support the British Government and the international community in attempting to find a solution to the island's current division, which happened in 1974 with the partition of the island after the seizure of northern Cyprus by Turkish troops and the creation of Turkish administered northern Cyprus. The green line running across the island that is policed by United Nations troops is an ever-present reminder of the island's divisions.

[Mr. Richard Spring]

United Nations ideas for a bi-zonal and bi-communal federal government, which were submitted in 1992, remain central to discussion of the island's future. I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) that that should be stated explicitly. The announcement of the Denktash-Clerides talks in January 2002 was encouraging, and it is a great disappointment that further progress has not been made. Although I appreciate that the talks are currently at a delicate stage, can the Minister spread further light on any progress and on the shared aspiration to reach a successful agreement before the Copenhagen meeting?

In the final analysis, only the two communities in Cyprus can come to an agreement with which they are both happy and with which they can both move forward. The United Kingdom's role should be to offer advice, to facilitate talks without getting in the way and to support the United Nation's efforts as we have been doing.

Alongside the talks on the political disputes on the island there is the issue of missing persons. Since 1974, a number of people have been missing on both sides of the green line. That continues to cause considerable and understandable distress to families. I welcome the UN Secretary-General's appeal to both parties to address that issue seriously. I also welcome the recognition by the two leaders that, although the issue should be dealt with separately from the main settlement talks, it must be dealt with in parallel with those talks. I am pleased to read on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website that our high commission in Nicosia is taking a close interest. Should the current negotiations prove successful, as we hope that they will, what effect do the Government think that that would have on the status of the British sovereign bases on the island?

I want to pick up on the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love). We do not believe that the present division of Cyprus should hinder the application of Cyprus for membership of the European Union. Negotiations between Cyprus and the EU began in 1998 and have progressed rapidly and successfully. Cyprus is on course for membership, as planned, in 2004. Although we hope that a political solution to the island's division can be found, we do not believe that any such solution should be a prerequisite to Cyprus becoming a member of the EU. We have always recognised the Republic of Cyprus and its accession to the EU would not contravene, in any way, the provisions of the treaty of guarantee. However, to echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), who made an especially powerful speech, we also welcome Turkey's intention to become a member of the EU.

We call upon Turkey to use its influence to assist in the construction of a solution to the Cyprus question. Notwithstanding the uncertainty over the future attitude of the new Turkish Government—about which my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) spoke tellingly—we believe that Turkey has a valuable role to play. Does the Minister agree that it should be made clear to Turkey that its accession to the EU would be severely set back should it consider the annexation of northern Cyprus?

The resolution of the island's division would greatly benefit the island's communities. The Turkish Cypriot community has not thrived since the island's division—quite the reverse. Both communities will remain cut off from parts of their heritage while the green line remains. Given our historical connections with the island, it is right that we should play a part in the peace process and give it our fullest encouragement.

I have made it clear that we do not regard a settlement as a prerequisite for Cyprus's membership of the EU, but no one disputes that a settlement would be highly desirable. We hope that a settlement will come about, and we look forward in the near future to sitting alongside Cyprus in the EU as trusted, valued and long-standing friends and allies.

12.18 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on securing this debate; and I welcome the vigour and power of the speeches and, in particular, the moderate and reasoned way in which arguments have been advanced. The authorities on both sides of the green line in Cyprus, as well as the authorities in Ankara, would be well advised to study the speeches of the two Opposition spokesmen—the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) and the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring). There was little in either of them with which the Government would disagree.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon is a powerful advocate of the interests of the Hellenic community in Europe. He threatened to make his speech in Greek. I have heard him speak that language with considerable elegance, so it was no empty threat, believe me. The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), too, is well known as a committed friend of Cyprus. He placed the whole problem in a much wider historic setting, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love). I have visited the beautiful island of Cyprus on many occasions, although not recently, and nothing would give me greater pleasure if my appointment as Minister for Europe, the vista of which opens before me, could begin with a settlement of the Cyprus problem. I thank hon. Members for their congratulations on my appointment.

The Cyprus problem is of deep concern to the Government and to diplomats. I thank those who have drawn attention to the excellent work of our High Commissioner in Nicosia, but others in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have worked very hard to bring about such a settlement. I am a little nervous of making unqualified statements in this job, as a distinguished predecessor in the 1950s—a Mr. Hopkinson—once said at the Dispatch Box that Cyprus would never become independent. However, Cyprus became independent under the great leadership of Archbishop Makarios, and Mr. Hopkinson ceased to be a Minister. Those who invite me to make unconditional statements may find me a little diffident.

Let us not forget that it is the 25th anniversary of the death of Archbishop Makarios, whose wise leadership is remembered by all. Let us also not forget that it was not the Turks who overthrew him, arrested him and sought to chase him from the island, but Greek Cypriots in the last expression—the last flurry—of European fascism

and of interference of the military in the affairs of a European state. I draw special attention to the speeches made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) and the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), both of whom in their different ways insisted on the importance of opposing what they referred to as "rejectionist" politics. I remember visiting the refugee camps in Cyprus in the 1970s. Over two or three years, they became smaller and smaller due to the great energy of the Cypriot people, who did not want endlessly to maintain a life in a refugee camp. They found outlets for their economic entrepreneurship, much of which has enriched our own communities in the United Kingdom.

Reference was made to the strength of the people of the Greek Cypriot diaspora and to the extent to which the people of the Turkish Cypriot diaspora may be able to talk more easily in Green lanes than they can across the green line in Cyprus. That is an important point, because throughout Europe there are great communities of people who have been ejected from their lands. There is current controversy in central Europe over people of German or Austrian background who lived in the Sudetenland of Bohemia. That is a very sensitive issue. Millions of Poles were expelled from their native homelands in 1945. However, I believe that a line must be drawn under history at some stage. It is right to draw the Chamber's attention to the opportunity that lies before us in the next few weeks to leave the rejectionists' line of the respective diasporas to one side. Every encouragement should be given to all the interested parties of both communities to seize that opportunity. That is the combined and unified message from the House and from the debate, the timing of which is excellent. It will have served more than the usual purpose of airing a great cause, which matters deeply to the people of this country.

Settlement is the goal in front of us—Cyprus coming into the European Union and Ankara under its new Government looking west, as hon. Members have put it so eloquently, to a European destiny. If we are to reach that goal, it goes without saying that a settlement is needed. I therefore urge the two leaders of the respective communities in Cyprus to redouble their efforts in the short time left to reach agreement before the Copenhagen Council.

I thank and congratulate the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his special adviser Alvaro de Soto, who have worked tirelessly and patiently to bridge the gaps between the two sides. One can feel the quickening pace of history in the eastern Mediterranean up through the Dardanelles to Constantinople, as I prefer to call it, and on into Ankara. I am sure that hon. Members join me in supporting the UN at this time; if it can help to accelerate the pace of history, so much the better to help both sides to reach a settlement. That is attainable but if it is to work it has to be lasting and comprehensive and both sides must feel it to be just. That means that a settlement that works will cause some pain to both sides, but surely the prize is worth the pain. We say no to rejectionism.

The UN Secretary-General has asked all those close to the talks to preserve a blackout on their content, so right hon. and hon. Members will understand why I do not go into detail. However, there is a settlement that meets the key interests of both sides and the national interest of the two motherlands, Greece and Turkey, and that settlement is attainable. Such a settlement will banish the Greek Cypriot nightmare of Turkish Cypriot secession and recognition and it will banish the Turkish Cypriot nightmare, which is a real one, of domination by the Greek Cypriots. It will mean a Cyprus with a single international personality speaking with one voice in the European Union and in other international forums. It will mean a Cyprus with two politically equal entities with responsibility for their own affairs; Greek and Turkish Cypriots will be masters in their own houses.

Much has been made in the debate about the interrelation between Cypriot accession to the European Union, which will be decided at Copenhagen, and the issue of Turkey looking to Europe. We strongly support Turkey's application for European Union membership and look forward to the day when it is seated at the Council table. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said yesterday in response to the election results from Turkey:

> "Britain and Turkey have much to do together, particularly in the run-up to the Copenhagen European Council. I very much hope this will include progress on Cyprus. We must all redouble our support for the UN Secretary-General's efforts to achieve a just and lasting settlement in Cyprus."

At Copenhagen we will be looking at the next stage of Turkey's candidature, which we want to move forward, within the framework of the Helsinki European Council conclusions.

We will need to consider many difficult technical points, but if we make each technical demand a sine qua non and put it on the table we will not be able to get to Copenhagen with the possibility—thanks to the very great work by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and his team and by British diplomats—of the prize, at the beginning of the 21st century, of a settlement, a solution to the problem of Cyprus.

The British Government will do their best; I am happy to write to hon. Members if they feel that I have not mentioned or replied to particular points in my remarks. My message again and again—I speak as a friend of Cyprus, I hope—that will allow this problem to be solved is that it is up to the Greek Cypriots, the Turkish Cypriots to make the gestures to arrive at a settlement, not to demand that all their conditions are met. Do that, and the eastern Mediterranean moves to peace and the European Union moves forward more strongly in the 21st century.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): We now move on to the next debate in Westminster Hall this morning, initiated by the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). It has come to my attention that one or two Back-Bench Members—in other words, not the initiator of the debate or the Minister—wish to speak. It is the custom of the House that if any hon. Member wishes to intervene in an Adjournment debate they must seek permission of not only the initiator of the debate and the Minister, but the Chair. One or two colleagues on the

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

Opposition Benches have already spoken to me. If there are others, perhaps they will acquaint me after I have called the hon. Member for Blaby to speak.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not necessary. I call the hon. Member for Blaby.

New Midlands Airport

12.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that one or two Labour Members may wish to make short interventions. I have spoken to the Minister about that, as they may have done. This is not a partisan political issue; it unites the people who live in the area potentially served by the airport. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue. It is the first occasion since the announcement on 23 July that the proposal to build a new airport between Rugby and Coventry has been properly aired in the House.

The proposal has galvanised opinion in the area, not least in my constituency. Driving through places such as Ullesthorpe and the Claybrookes one sees hundreds of signs saying "Stop Rugby Airport". I have received hundreds of letters—too many, in fact—from people opposed to the airport. There are already many thousands of signatures on a petition that I started. Other hon. Members in Warwickshire and Northamptonshire, particularly, I suspect, the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Andy King), may have received even more letters. Feelings are even stronger in those areas than in Leicestershire. A protest march through the villages of Church Lawford and Kings Newham attracted 7,000 people despite the pouring rain.

The proposal arrived out of the blue on 23 July, although many people in the Department of Transport had been working on it for many years. I shall not forget the shock on the face of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth when he questioned the Secretary of State about the issue. Half his constituency was about to be covered by a runway. It is an extraordinary proposal—it harks back to the days of central planning in the Soviet Union. Central planning like that has not been practised since the 1950s or 1960s in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"The old predict and provide approach . . . is dead."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2000; Vol. 345, c. 865.]

He was referring specifically to housing, but I think that his words apply here too.

The proposal to build an entirely new airport seems to run contrary to the whole tenor of public policy and contradicts various policy documents. First, the flood plain of the Avon would be covered in concrete and tarmac, contrary to all the pronouncements following recent heavy flooding. We all know that flooding is likely to get more frequent and worse as a result of climate change. Government policy, as laid out in planning policy guidance 25 on development and flood risk, rules out such large developments on flood plains. The accompanying press release dated 17 July 2001 states:

"Comprehensive new planning guidance directs development away from flood risk areas."

It quoted the then Planning Minister—now the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble)—as saying:

"Firm guidance against development in areas that regularly function as flood plains is overdue."

She added that high-risk areas should be avoided unless they were absolutely essential for development. The policy guidance itself states:

"Where, exceptionally, development is permitted, it should . . . not impede flood flows or result in a net loss of flood-plain storage."

That is fairly plain.

A second contradiction is that all Government policy is against major construction on such greenfield sites. PPG 3 precludes such developments in general. A former Minister for Housing and Planning said in March 2001 that draft regional planning guidance for the east midlands recommended that

"no new greenfield sites should be promoted"

for industrial development

"until a comprehensive analysis has been carried out of the quantity and quality of the existing supply of employment land."

We shall see not only the destruction of the countryside, including historic villages, but real damage to the local environment on a scale that is hard to imagine.

An airport of that size with three runways—bigger than Heathrow—would require an enormous infrastructure with warehousing, homes for employees, car parking and so forth. Those familiar with Heathrow will know what that would look like and will also be aware of the volume of traffic. The M6, M1 and M69 in that area are already grossly congested. The proposal refers to an extra motorway lane and points out that the volume-to-capacity ratio would be 200 per cent. on the M1 down to London—twice the traffic that the road was built to accommodate. An extra lane is a charming idea. If people tried driving, as I and other hon. Members do, up and down the M1 on a Friday evening, they would realise that the congestion between London and junction 17 with the M45 is simply horrific.

The development would create a concrete urban sprawl all the way from Rugby to Wolverhampton with the Arden forest as a narrow corridor. Why would we create such an environmental disaster? To some extent it is the function of civil servants to predict and plan, though few get it right. To quote the Deputy Prime Minister, "predict and provide" is dead.

It is predicted that air transport will keep on growing at the current rate, trebling by 2030, and we should ask whether that is desirable. We hear every month or so reports of near misses in air traffic control over our skies. That is hardly surprising because our air space, like our land mass, is limited and crowded. What will be the impact on air traffic control and safety of trebling the number of flights? It is also predicted that business travel as well as leisure travel will keep growing, but new technology, particularly video conferencing, is likely to reduce that growth in the long term. A meeting in an

office via video conferencing might take only an hour and stop the need to fly to the United States and spend a couple of nights in a hotel, so that is sensible. The impact of 11 September has already had a major effect on business travel. That, coupled with technological advance, will mean that it will not continue to grow.

On leisure travel, one wonders how many foreign holidays we can all have. It is a matter of choice, but I suspect that an infinite number of people could fly an infinite number of times on holiday—but perhaps not. The front of yesterday's *Daily Telegraph* featured an advertisement to fly to Gerona—apparently near Barcelona—for £9.99 each way. My taxi ride in London last night cost rather more.

As for cargo, while it is convenient to have vegetables grown in Africa in our supermarkets all the year round, the environmental movement is deeply disturbed by the problem of embedded carbon, and so am I. I try never to buy green beans from Zambia, Zimbabwe or Kenya, or apples from the Antipodes, because it is ridiculous to pollute the atmosphere transporting such goods for our convenience. Again, it is a matter of choice, but we must all confront that issue.

Air travel has a disproportionate effect on climate change because carbon emissions are delivered high up in the atmosphere, damaging the ozone layer. Let me quote Friends of the Earth, of which I have been a member for many years:

"Air travel is the world's fastest growing source of greenhouse gases . . . aviation generates as much CO^2 annually as that from all human activities in Africa . . .Nitrogen oxides . . .and water vapour have a more significant effect on the climate when emitted at altitude than at ground level... An increase in supersonic aircraft flying could further damage the ozone layer as aircraft emissions of NOx deplete ozone concentrations at high altitudes, where these aircraft would typically fly."

After Rio, Kyoto and Johannesburg, it is not unfanciful to think that international action may soon result in duties being imposed on air fuel to deter the growth in air travel, as predicted in the plan.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): An airport of that size is presumably only justified by the hope of displacing traffic congestion in the south-east. Would my hon. Friend accept my judgment as a former Minister for aviation that that is based upon erroneous conceptions? First, people in the south-east will not travel to Rugby to fly out. Secondly, because of hubbing and interchange in the south-east, an airport in Rugby is a totally unrealistic proposition.

Mr. Robathan: I accept what my hon. Friend says. It is unrealistic to suggest that such an airport could supplant an airport in the south-east. Of course, the overwhelming reason why a greenfield site should be chosen is that fewer people will suffer from noise. People who buy houses next to a noisy airport know that they are doing so, but airports are getting quieter, and international agreements ensure that in future aircraft engines will be quieter still. The European Commission says:

"An aircraft entering the fleet today is typically 20 dB quieter than a comparable aircraft of 30 years ago. In practice this corresponds to a reduction in noise annoyance of around 75 per cent".

In January, an international agreement was reached in Montreal by the International Civil Aviation Organisation's committee on aviation environmental protection, which sets a new noise standard 10 decibels lower on a cumulative basis than the current standards. We all welcome that, as it undermines the case for not using existing capacity at airports.

One reason why a new airport might be preferred is that 27 per cent. of its passengers may travel by rail. I am keen that people should travel by rail—I do so myself as much as possible. However, it takes one hour 22 minutes to get from London to Birmingham international airport by rail at the moment , which makes me greatly worried about the grandiose proposal. Everything has been set out in expensive documents costing more than £500,000, according to a written answer to a parliamentary question of mine. We are told that everyone will have the opportunity to respond. Well, not quite everyone, because my constituents—I received a message from one this morning—are finding it difficult to obtain the consultation document and questionnaire. Yesterday, one constituent received 1,000 copies, which he had asked for in August on behalf of many people. Some people who asked for documents in August or September have yet to receive them.

The situation is worse, however. Government policy is to be determined on the basis of the questionnaire. NOP has been employed—I am sure that that is costing a great deal of money, although my parliamentary question received a rather fudged answer. Whoever devised the questionnaire should be sacked, and I suggest that the Government get rid of NOP.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, if there has to be any extra capacity at all, he is making a case for looking seriously at Birmingham's proposal for a short, wide-spaced second runway, which would not pose the environmental problems to which he referred?

Mr. Robathan: I have read Birmingham airport's document, but I do not wish to shift the problem to Birmingham. I shall merely say that its airport is not fully utilised at the moment.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): In the interest of saving time, will my hon. Friend accept my complete association, on behalf of all my constituents, with his powerful argument? I would simply add that the behemoth wished upon us would create huge stress on the infrastructure between the midlands and the south-east, and on scarce resources of building and development land.

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to know that I entirely agree.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): For good measure, may I too support my hon. Friend? We in Bosworth are appalled at the threat to the green belt.

Mr. Robathan: I thank my hon. Friend. It takes one hour 22 minutes to get from Birmingham international airport to London and just over an hour to get from Rugby station to London. I make that journey most weeks. It takes well in excess of half an hour to get from Heathrow, Luton, Gatwick or Stansted to central London.

[Mr. Robathan]

It is therefore not surprising that there are no scheduled flights from the midlands to the south-east, contrary to the questionnaire's expectations and assumptions. Question 5b says:

"Would you like a greater number of flights from the midlands to London, or is the current number adequate?"

The current number is zero. Question 6a says:

"From which of the region's airports listed below would you like to see a greater number of flights to London?"

Question 7 includes the phrase:

"If access to the south east of England by air from local midlands airports could no longer be provided",

but there are no such air services. Can the Minister tell us how much this ludicrous questionnaire is costing the taxpayer? Frankly, he has been ditched in it by NOP.

The cost is said to be almost £7 billion—£6.9 billion, I think—before the figures are revised, and as far as I am aware, figures are always revised upwards. For all the reasons I have given, my constituents and I oppose the proposed option almost unanimously. I will present a petition before the end of the month with many thousands of signatures. I hope that the Minister can confirm that the many letters of opposition that he receives will be considered equally, as will responses to the utterly flawed consultation questionnaire. Will he also explain how it came to be so pathetically and badly flawed? I trust that the Government will see the strength of the opposition and of our arguments, and not pursue this damaging proposal any further.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am prepared to call one or two Members before the Minister if they wish to speak, but I hope that they will speak for no more than one minute each.

12.46 pm

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): I sympathise entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). The proposal for an airport in the Rugby area is quite crazy.

Another quite crazy proposal is that Birmingham airport should be closed. I should like to make it clear to hon. Members and to the Minister that my constituents in Solihull would say of Birmingham airport, "Make the most of what you've got." We do not want a second runway at Birmingham airport; that would be a great blight on my constituents, and it is my trenchant duty to speak for them in opposition to a second runway at Birmingham.

12.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on securing the debate. Discussing the important topic of the future of air services in our country now seems to be a weekly occurrence. That subject is vital to our economy, and, as we have seen here today, generates strong views. It is right to air those views in this Chamber and elsewhere.

The hon. Member for Blaby asked whether the views expressed here and by his constituents will be taken into consideration. They most certainly will. We are listening to all those making representations to us as we progress towards the White Paper. We will be canvassing views on the wide range of issues and options published in the seven consultation documents that cover the whole United Kingdom.

It is worth reminding ourselves of the questions that underpin the consultation. The first, to which the hon. Member for Blaby alluded, is how much, if any, additional airport capacity is needed. The second is where any new capacity should or could be located. The final question is what measures will be needed to control and mitigate the environmental impact of any airport growth. The answers to those questions will help us to decide how to respond to the projected growth in air travel and how to provide a framework for sustainable development during the next 30 years.

The debate on future airport capacity should be set firmly in context, and I shall briefly give some background to the plan. In 1970, some 32 million passengers passed through United Kingdom airports. Today, that number of people passes through Gatwick alone. The national figure is now 180 million passengers per annum. People increasingly want to travel by air for leisure and holidays—we have a shrinking world and an international economy—and our forecasts show that demand for air travel will continue to grow with the UK's national prosperity, and that of other countries. Air travel for business and leisure is a fact of life. Last year, half our population flew at least once. For our parents, 40 or 50 years ago, that would have been unimaginable. Set against that, our major airports are already full or filling up rapidly. Birmingham international airport is experiencing severe pressures at certain peak periods, and our analysis suggests, under all the policy scenarios that we have examined, that it would run out of runway capacity before 2030 unless air travel throughout the United Kingdom were to be severely constrained. I shall return to that in a moment.

Airport development is a matter of national interest with wide-ranging implications for people and the environment, and it is right that a Government should look ahead and plan strategically. That is contrary to what the hon. Member for Blaby implied. Previous Governments ducked the issue. In more than 100 years of aviation in this country, we have never looked intelligently and dispassionately at the problems, consulted people on them, and tried to find a solution.

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): It is important that regional airports should act as the core of the economic development of our regions, so a regional airport needs to be in the right place and to serve its region well. Birmingham airport does that for the midlands, and we are all united behind using Birmingham and East Midlands airports wisely. Some of the assessments that were undertaken in advising the Minister were fundamentally flawed. The projections for the Rugby option are out by millions of passengers, so that is no go.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend makes some powerful points. That is exactly why we are holding the consultation. We need to hear such views expressed—not only to raise local matters, but so that the figures can be challenged. That is what a good consultation is about. If we thought that we had everything right and

that all the information were correct, there would be no point in having consultation. I underline the fact that we have not taken any decisions on these matters. Our airports consultation document put forward various options and invited views so that we could have an informed public debate on the important issues involved.

Mr. McCabe: With all due respect to the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), who rightly represents his constituents' interests, the key point is that we should be addressing, in the long term, wider regional economic and environmental issues that go way beyond the interests of 40 or 50 residents in a particular area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind hon. Members that this is a short debate, and the Minister probably has a lot to say. Unless interventions are absolutely vital, I suggest that he be allowed to finish his speech.

Mr. Jamieson: Thank you Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will, of course, consider as many matters as I can in the seven minutes that I have left.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) is right to say that there are wide economic issues, but there are also very important environmental and human issues such as damage to the environment and people being affected by noise and other side effects of aircraft. We are having the consultation to try carefully to balance the increased need to fly with the needs of the environment and of people on the ground.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to the Minister; I shall be brief. It is about balancing the economic, environmental and social needs of everybody, and the proposed airport represents an imbalance.

Mr. Jamieson: The options include additional runways at Birmingham and East Midlands airports. However, each proposal has its drawbacks. For example, the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) could tell the hon. Gentleman of the increased aircraft noise and road congestion that would be created if Birmingham were the chosen option. East Midlands airport, on the other hand, is not thought to be in the best location to meet demand.

Mr. John Taylor: May I make it perfectly clear that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) is completely out of order in saying that just 40 or 50 people would be affected by a second runway at Birmingham airport? A whole borough would be affected, and many people are registering their views. I emphatically state that it would not be 40 or 50 people.

Mr. Jamieson: We can see the passions now being aroused, and quite right too; we are in this Chamber to discuss an issue that has aroused passion around the country. I fully appreciate the points of the hon. Member for Blaby. I know that he wants to represent his constituents robustly, as do the hon. Member for Solihull and my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) who has not spoken but who takes an interest in these matters.

I sat on the Opposition Benches for a while—

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman will be there again.

Mr. Jamieson: Perhaps, but not in the lifetime of this Parliament.

In addition to making points on behalf of one's constituents, one needs a certain intellectual integrity in one's arguments. The first question that we must ask is whether we should constrain the opportunities to fly. The hon. Member for Blaby asked how many foreign holidays people have, and whether it was desirable or possible to increase opportunities to fly. In the hon. Gentleman's questionnaire to his constituents he should ask whether they want, in future, the opportunity to fly on holiday or on business.

If opportunities to fly are to increase, the question is, from where should flights fly? The hon. Member for Solihull says, "Not in Solihull, if you don't mind." The hon. Member for Blaby says, on behalf of the people of Sapcote, Sharnford, Broughton Astley, Lutterworth and the other villages in Blaby, "Not in my area." Is the solution to increase the capacity in the south-east? We have listened in this Chamber to hon. Members representing constituencies near Stansted, Gatwick and Heathrow, who make precisely the same arguments as those of the hon. Member for Blaby. There is no intellectual integrity in an argument that states that on the one hand we want to allow people the opportunity to fly, and to increase that opportunity, but on the other we will not make the necessary provision.

If the Government did nothing, and had not held this consultation, the situation would grow as it has over the past 100 years. It would grow in an unsustainable manner that would affect the environment and people. We would see a constant pressure on Heathrow for new runways and stands, and pressure would grow on Birmingham, perhaps on Solihull. This debate to see how we can meet people's wishes without creating environmental damage would not have taken place. Does the hon. Member for Blaby think that the people of Blaby should be constrained in the future in their opportunities to fly?

Mr. Robathan: The question is one of balance between everybody's needs and wishes, and the economy. Building a brand new airport would create an imbalance.

Mr. Jamieson: I did not get an answer to my question, which has to be answered yes or no. If we want to increase the opportunities for people to fly, we have to find somewhere to do it. I accept that a balance must be struck, but the Government have been bold in putting these questions forward. Should we increase people's opportunities to fly on business? In the interest of economic prosperity, should we increase the quantities of freight going in and out of the country? The argument that we need to increase opportunities to fly while providing fewer airports and passing air traffic into other people's areas has no intellectual integrity

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank the Minister for his reply. We now move on to the next debate.

Sexual Abuse

1 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The sexual abuse of children is a problem that many, including hon. Members, are unwilling or embarrassed to address. It is estimated that between 35,000 and 72,000 children are abused in England and Wales each year, and another survey suggests that one in 10 children experience some form of sexual abuse during their childhoods. Sexual abuse can destroy lives and debase people's humanity, and we must do everything we can to prevent it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on her Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall on 16 October in which certain aspects of sexual abuse were discussed. Today, I want to take a slightly different look at the subject by making a case for early intervention to deter potential abusers at an early age—even when they are children. There is much debate and public outrage after offences are detected, but far less debate and action on how to prevent offences from taking place in the first place.

The Government have an excellent record on tackling sexual abuse, but they have almost no record on prevention. Children are best protected by finding potential abusers as early as possible and preventing them from offending. In 1987—my first year in Parliament—I was approached by a family who wanted to get back two of their children who had been taken into care. For me, that marked the beginning of an infamous sexual abuse case, the Broxtowe case, with which people in Nottinghamshire will be familiar. It hurt many of my constituents and has scarred the police officers who had to deal with it. The horrors of those cases made me ask why a parent or relative would abuse a child. We should devise an effective intervention to prevent abuse and save such children, along with countless others.

We should intervene early and actively in families and households where there are factors that could develop into abusing behaviour. A tragic feature of all abusive relationships, especially those involving children, is that abuse becomes a familiar pattern of existence, and we need to intervene before that pattern becomes established and before the victim cannot imagine life without it. Otherwise, the abused can in turn become the abuser, which is an all too familiar, although not inevitable, pattern.

Without intervention, some of those children become the adolescents who commit one third of recorded sex attacks on children. Many of those young people respond well to treatment, the provision of which needs to be more equitable and better funded. Around 50 per cent. of children who sexually abuse others were or are being abused themselves. That is not making excuses; it is a sad fact. Schemes established through the guidelines issued by the Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the Home Office have produced inter-agency co-operation. Those schemes have worked in my constituency where the relevant agencies have received a positive inspection report. The creation of whistleblowing policies and training to deal with abusers has also had a positive impact.

In the long term, an impact needs to be made on the problem by serious and systematic parenting skills classes in school to allow children to discover standards and models of care, respect and love that sadly they have not experienced at home. Will my hon. Friend the Minister undertake to discuss parenting skills in our education system with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills?

It is vital that abused children become aware that better relationships are possible. The biggest influences on children are television and films, and I have no wish to censor those media or suggest that they retreat into some sort of cosy model family that existed in the 1950s. None the less, will my hon. Friend the Minister encourage the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to open a debate with people who make programmes and films, especially for children, on the need to hold up good models of behaviour and relationships? Children who have been damaged in real life do not need to see that damage repeated in their entertainment. Adults should not have their abusive behaviour reinforced.

Sadly, far more sexual abuse is committed by family members, household members or someone well known to the victim than by strangers. "Stranger danger" accounts for only about 20 per cent. of sexual abuse cases. A recent National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children survey on child maltreatment found that 1 per cent. of all our young people have been sexually abused by a parent and 3 per cent. have been sexually abused by another relative.

We all know that there are abusers of all ages, from all walks of life and areas, but we should be looking out for families where abuse is likely to occur. One key factor in many, if not most, child sex abuse cases is that sexual attraction is not the prime motive. The abuser wants to wield and display power. Sexual abuse is often part of a wider pattern of violence and emotional abuse. Indeed, it completes that pattern. The sexual abuse of children is often accompanied by many other more familiar symptoms of physical and emotional distress. Those symptoms may well be attributed to a more conventional cause, particularly since children are so often unable or reluctant to talk about abuse of any kind.

It is important to have data-sharing between midwives, health visitors, police officers, teachers, social workers and probation officers. They need to talk to one another and pick up the early signals. Together, they may identify a risk that may be missed by individual agencies. The multi-agency panels that gather after abuse is revealed are needed earlier to intervene and prevent abuse. Data-sharing can give vital clues to the need for early intervention. Apart from delivering children from intolerable suffering, such intervention might head off a lifelong problem that would require vast resources to contain and manage.

Some of the things that I have talked about may sound draconian or seem to infringe civil liberties, but what rights does an abused child have? We must be prepared to take action against the potential abuser. The removal of a violent or abusive partner could be the best solution for all concerned. In Nottingham, North, the social services department encourages the removal of the perpetrator and provides support to the non-abusive parent. The solution may not always be that

simple. The supposedly non-abusive parent may have colluded in the abuse and forfeited the child's trust. For some abused children, there may be no alternative but to be taken into care.

Many agencies also still find it quite difficult to work together and that results in unco-ordinated policy and an inability to share good ideas and best practices nationwide. The Government must sponsor a multi-agency response to deal with the varied cases that come before local authorities.

In Nottingham, North, there is an early intervention and assessment panel that offers help to the abuser. It has been an incredible success and I commend it to the Minister. It was set up as a result of a local initiative in the social services department. The panel works with young sexual abusers and those showing signs of worrying sexual behaviour to assess their needs and to find the right response at the earliest possible moment. In many cases, that involves not just the criminal justice system, but training and education. The panel has made another breakthrough in working with both the abuser and their parents. It has helped families to stay together in incredibly difficult circumstances. I pay an unreserved tribute to the hard-pressed local council officers who have worked so hard on making the initiative a success.

The NSPCC is developing the work of its young abusers teams, which are excellent. Teams are sent out to help those who have not yet abused others, but who show signs of doing so in the future. They are also crucial in developing centres for young people convicted of sexual abuse crimes. Those centres give abusers the help and support that they need so that they do not reoffend. At one such centre, treatment was given to a group of 59 offenders. The usual rate of reoffending is 20 per cent. After treatment at the centre only three people reoffended.

The provision of care centres is patchy. Some offenders do not have access to the help that they need. In his reply to the debate, will my hon. Friend undertake to develop nationwide records of community nursing showing where those services are? Non-statutory bodies, such as the NSPCC and Barnardos, have taken the lead in care treatment and support with programmes such as G-MAP and the Lucy Faithful Foundation.

The lack of provision means that almost anyone can set up a centre to treat young people. The mixture of social services, non-statutory bodies and private care means that it is difficult to establish and guarantee a uniform level of care. The provision for those with sexually harmful behaviour is even more scant in young offenders' institutions. Only two out of 10 have provision for treating those young people. The programmes are often based on adult schemes, which are unsuitable and inappropriate for young people. A prison system that does nothing to stop offenders developing is not acceptable.

The NSPCC informs me that lack of national funding for specialist treatment means that the meagre funds allocated by social services departments are often wasted, resulting in a refusal by some councils to send people out of the area for treatment if there is no local specialist provision because of the cost. The Government must also now begin to consider the funding of those treatment centres. Leaving it to the private sector is not good enough. Money spent now will prevent investigations, prosecutions and prison sentences later.

Government spending on research does not match the size of the problem. I would be grateful if the Minister would write to me and let me know current research spending throughout Departments on the sexual abuse of children. When he has discovered that figure, I will leave it to his good judgment to decide whether we should establish a national institute for research into the sexual abuse of children. I raised the matter within a year or two of coming to the House in 1989 and I assure my hon. Friend that I shall continue to do so. Whether he is the Minister responsible is not a matter for me, but I wish him well in answering the queries that I shall raise.

The problems need to be addressed coherently. When preparing for this debate, I was shuttled between the social exclusion unit, the Home Office, the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills—I exonerate the Home Office and my hon. Friend the Minister's private office—before I could obtain answers to some obvious questions about the sexual abuse of children. We must develop a clear and overarching strategy in those Departments and someone must be clearly designated by the Prime Minister to take the lead and responsibility in this difficult matter.

What must the Government do to help to prevent sexual abuse of children? First, they must give as much emphasis to prevention as they rightly do to punishment. Secondly, the Government must build on the excellent work at local level in developing multi-agency teams and defining responsibility for spotting families where sexual abuse of children is likely to take place. We must be brave in our actions to remove children before irrevocable damage is done to them. Thirdly, the Government must take action to help potential young offenders not to offend and to treat and re-educate those who have offended. Fourthly, the Government can no longer pass all the responsibility to local level. They must have a national strategy to help to develop and fund the treatment that is already working so well in some parts of the country. They must also fund a coherent, serious programme of research into the causes and prevention of sexual abuse.

Finally, the Prime Minister, who heads our Government and could deal with such issues in an afternoon were he focused on them, should give a named Minister direct responsibility for a prevention programme that would join up the thinking between Departments, including the Department for Education and Skills, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department of Health and the Home Office. Without the actions I have outlined today and more, we will not have done all we can to fulfil our responsibilities towards children who have already suffered sexual abuse and the countless thousands who could do so unless we act promptly, clearly and soon. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his presence today and look forward to hearing his response.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Wills): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North

[Mr. Michael Wills]

(Mr. Allen). With characteristic acuity and perspicacity, he has identified an important issue. We should be grateful to him for the trouble that he has taken over many years on behalf of the most vulnerable and needy members of society.

Sexual abuse is a serious, profoundly damaging crime, for all the reasons that my hon. Friend has set out, particularly when it is committed against children and within families. By their nature, such crimes are not visible. They usually occur in private and without witnesses. Victims, therefore, experience—almost by definition—an appalling breach of trust and a terrible transgression of self, in a way that often leaves them damaged psychologically and, almost worse, unable to discuss the abuse with anybody. Sexual abuse thrives in an atmosphere of secrecy. That is why it is important to stress—as my hon. Friend has done—our shared responsibility to protect children from such crime. It is not easy, as he recognises. It requires concerted action at local and national levels, across government and across a range of agencies, both governmental and third sector. As a society, we should engage with the problem in a considered and strategic way in order to prevent it. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for having taken exactly that approach.

Department of Health figures indicate that some 160,000 children are referred to the child protection process each year. That is a horrifying figure. Every year, 40,000 children become the subject of child protection inquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 and 27,000 names were added to the child protection register in 2000–01. An increasing proportion—more than three quarters—of initial child protection conferences result in registration. However, 96 per cent. of those 160,000 children remain at home and the majority of those who are separated from their families are swiftly reunited. The number on the child protection register has recently reduced to 26,800.

Fewer children now remain on the child protection register for long periods of time. That is because, in many cases, their problems are addressed by way of more intensive early intervention to meet their overall developmental needs and by the provision of support to families.

Providing such support is a top priority for the Government, and the Prime Minister is focusing on it. I am sorry that my hon. Friend has been shuffled from Department to Department, and I hope that he will recognise that because the issue is complex, it is inevitable that a number of Departments will have an interest in it. He paid tribute to multi-agency working at local level, and we must work in the same way. The Home Office has an interest, in that criminal offences might be being perpetrated. The Department for Education and Skills—with its responsibility for the development of young people—has an interest, as, clearly, does the Department of Health. So, too, does the social exclusion unit. Problems are often most acute when they are visited on the most vulnerable members of society, because they are compounded by other issues that arise from social exclusion.

Mr. Allen: Can I first make it clear that I do not mean anything untoward by pointing out the slight dislocation in Government policy? I certainly do not want to berate officials or Ministers, because everyone is trying extremely hard at national and local levels. I simply want to suggest that joined-up thinking at national level would produce many benefits, and my hon. Friend could play a co-ordinating role by drawing all the strands together. We did something similar with the street crime initiative, and people were going in and out of No. 10 Downing street. If the Prime Minister were to bring the same amount of energy and co-ordination to bear on tackling this awful, secret aspect of crime, I am confident that we would see even better results.

Mr. Wills: I thank my hon. Friend. I recognise, as I am sure officials do, that he has approached the issue graciously. It is a matter not of blame, but of delivering better services, and I assure him that we are at one on that.

The Prime Minister has already taken action on the issue and, as my hon. Friend will be aware, he announced new Government structures in July 2000 to co-ordinate better policies and services for young people. A new Cabinet committee on children and young people's services was created, and, for the first time, we have a Minister for children and young people—my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) at the Home Office. The children and young people's unit at the Department for Education and Skills is also part of the new Government structures. We are trying to achieve joined-up policy-making across Departments, as my hon. Friend rightly wants. That will remove barriers and enable better and more effective co-ordination. My hon. Friend is right to highlight the issue's importance.

I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend on the development of parenting skills. The family support grant scheme is intended to develop more positive parenting skills, which will go some way towards addressing people's concerns.

Clearly, however, we need to do more. In recent years, we have revised the core inter-agency child protection guidance, which is called "Working Together to Safeguard Children". It sets out the roles and responsibilities of different agencies and practitioners and how they should work together to promote children's welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect. We have also introduced the framework for assessing children in need and their families. The implementation of such guidance will ensure that vulnerable children are safer, their needs are properly assessed and their welfare is promoted.

Mr. Allen: If the Prime Minister were to make a public announcement on the issue, the Government's actions would carry his weight and could incorporate his suggestons for policy development. He would, however, make another important contribution by helping to break the taboo on discussing sexual abuse. It is difficult to raise the issue even in a sensible environment such as this, particularly when there are many competing pressures. The Prime Minister could do an immense amount for local practitioners and for those who work for the NSPCC by helping to break that taboo so that we can all talk about ways forward on this important issue.

Mr. Wills: I am sure that the Prime Minister will carefully note my hon. Friend's views, but I should

reassure him that there is no doubt that everyone in the Government, including my right hon. Friend, is determined to tackle the issue effectively. My hon. Friend has done everyone a valuable service by highlighting sexual abuse and he is right that people often shy away from discussing it because it is so sensitive and raises many difficult issues. That is precisely why we must approach it in the way that we have—by co-ordinating action across government and across different agencies and by bringing in organisations such as the NSPCC and other third-sector bodies, with their skills and experience, to tackle the problems. There are no magic-bullet solutions, and everything that my hon. Friend has said recognises that.

My hon. Friend rightly drew our attention to the fact that, as we are all aware, too many offenders and potential offenders do not come to the attention of the authorities. That is why we launched the inter-agency "Stop it Now" campaign in September. It will use public health education to prevent child abuse and increase the general public's awareness of sexual abuse in a way that encourages responsible action. I think that that is precisely the sort of approach that my hon. Friend wants, and we need to build on it. The campaign aims to prevent abuse by encouraging abusers and potential abusers to seek help and by giving all adults the information that they need effectively to protect children. We cannot be overly prescriptive about it, but we have to lay the ground in that way.

It is not possible to predict whether a child who has been abused will go on to abuse others. Many of those who sexually offend against children do not have a history of sexual abuse. Similarly, because only a minority of those who are sexually abused go on to offend, a history of sexual victimisation is not, in itself, sufficient to create a sexual offender. That is important. Nevertheless, histories of childhood sexual abuse in sex offenders are often associated with other childhood risk factors, including neglect, family instability and problematic parenting, and we need to offer them support.

As I said, the family support grant scheme is one way to support such children. Many children who have been abused will receive therapeutic help from child and adolescent mental health services and other children's agencies—and, again, I pay tribute to the NSPCC. Those services are invaluable, and we need to build on them and to provide them with the support that they need.

My hon. Friend knows that we recently announced the publication of a Green Paper to identify radical options for improving services for children and young people. I hope that it will act as a platform to take forward some of the factors mentioned by my hon. Friend. The Green Paper will focus on identifying the referral and tracking of children at risk, and the provision of mainstream and specialist services. It will deal with overhauling existing arrangements, and consider the services that work with young people and children, including social services and youth justice, as well as the more conventional roles of schools, families and local communities.

The Green Paper will build on work that we have already done. From next year, we shall ask the chief executives of all the top-tier authorities in England to take a lead in co-ordinating the development of a strategy for preventive services for children and young people at risk. The aim of the strategy, which should be agreed by all the local agencies in the sort of partnership way that my hon. Friend envisages and would support, will be to increase the focus on preventive services—precisely what my hon. Friend has advocated—such as family support, early years development, behavioural support, including preventive child and adolescent mental health services, and youth services.

We know that we have to do better. We have to improve the life chances of children, and to give strong support to families. For far too long, it has been a hidden subject, and we must do better.

Mr. Allen: May I press my hon. Friend—I do not expect him to reply immediately, but perhaps to write to me—on the funding for such services? Will it be ring-fenced? For various reasons, the money in many social service budgets is often spent under other heads. That is a serious and long-term issue, and I hope that my hon. Friend will consider it.

Before he brings his remarks to a conclusion, will he say something about the need for having a research capacity, so that we can examine why sexual abusers offend and what we can do to prevent them offending in the first place?

Mr. Wills: I shall conclude by picking up on what my hon. Friend said. I reassure him that I understand absolutely why he is so concerned about those matters, and he is right to draw attention to them. If I may, I shall write to him about some of them.

I understand the importance of ring fencing. It sends an important signal. My hon. Friend will be aware of the important issues of principle and practice of ring-fencing such money, but such things are not necessarily as simple as they should be. My hon. Friend's interest is well known, and I understand why he is so concerned. We recognise that ring fencing is a complex matter. It crosses many Departments and agencies, and raises difficult issues.

We know that more needs to be done. We need to encourage every member of society to recognise the importance, the nature and the scale of the problem. We must ensure that agencies such as the police and social services, when responding to public concerns, are equipped to act swiftly and decisively. Funding, of course, is important in that respect. Equally, my hon. Friend will realise that there are no easy answers. We must accept that great difficulties face those who have to police and investigate allegations of that nature. It can be traumatising for those people, too, as my hon. Friend suggested from his experience in his constituency.

Having said all that, we must not use any of it as a reason for inactivity or complacency, or as an excuse not to set ourselves the highest targets to prevent such crime through the earliest possible identification of potential offenders and children who may be at risk. We must think creatively about how we use and share information, and how we spread understanding and awareness of the realities of the crime.

[Mr. Wills]

We are determined to make progress, and I hope to write to my hon. Friend to respond in detail to his questions.

Mr. Allen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I fear that there can be no point of order, as it is 1.30 pm and we must move on.

Mr. Allen: Would it be in order to bring to your attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact that I intend to seek another Adjournment debate this time next year to see how well the Government have done on the subject?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made his point very effectively, with or without my permission.

Decision-making in the NHS

1.30 pm

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): The debate is a tremendous opportunity to speak on behalf of the public on this important subject, and I am grateful to the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), for coming to respond to the debate.

The national health service belongs to the people. For far too long, decisions have been made by professionals, managers and politicians without much public involvement. I want to make three points. First, I shall dwell briefly on history. The Government do not like it when I do so, but I want to show the lessons that we have learned on how not to consult. Secondly, I shall discuss the weakness of the current arrangements for public involvement, and welcome the Government's additions to them. Thirdly, I want to mention some of the major decisions that will face the NHS in the near future, in which public involvement will be crucial.

In my county, we have learned bitterly how not to consult. The first lesson is to treat citizens as intelligent people, and to not talk down to them. I do not blame the Government for that; I blame the Government's servants in the area. When there is a problem, it must be faced openly and discussed with the people. Worcestershire has certainly had problems. They could have been faced much more openly, but the health authority made decisions before consultation, and consultation was then carried out to force measures through.

The authority had a closed mind to any alternative. It used spin and half-truths to force measures through. It said that a comprehensive hospital would remain in Kidderminster, but normal people would not consider a hospital to which they could not go for any in-patient emergency treatment comprehensive. Statistics were used in the most amazing way to justify measures. The 3.5 million contacts between Worcestershire patients and the NHS each year—contacts with general practitioners, outpatients and community nurses—were compared to the 12,000 patients who had to travel further for their hospital services. The authority was saying, "What are you worrying about? Less than 1 per cent. of people will have to travel further for their treatment." But that 1 per cent. was 100 per cent. of patients from my area who had to travel for in-patient treatment, and a few other patients from elsewhere.

The other tool is to misquote or selectively quote documents. Recently I have had consultations with the president of the Royal College of Physicians, which is my own college. The royal colleges are angry about how often they are blamed for reconfigurations when, in fact, they only issue guidelines, which can be misquoted. The health authority spokesman said that a particular college document had identified that hospitals

"serving populations of under 150,000 could not expect to be sustained in the future."

What the document actually said was that such hospitals

"should not continue as independent clinical units."

That is a completely different statement, because with partnerships the hospitals could be sustained.

The worst example of all was the previous chairman of the NHS Executive, who wrote to campaigners, trying to defuse the situation. He said:

"I also do not accept that Kidderminster hospital is 'down-graded' . . . Neither the Regional Office nor the Health Authority see what is proposed for Kidderminster as somehow being second class."

That is exactly how to rub salt into a wound. It shows a devastating lack of understanding. It is almost as bad as Marie Antoinette telling the people to eat cake during the French revolution.

The faults are there—the use of spin, half-truths, the misuse of statistics and the failure to grasp other people's points of view. The final lesson is too obvious: it relates to the inability to take into account the response to public consultation. Those responses should not just be swept under the carpet when they go against the wishes of the authorities. A stock answer given by health authority officials at heated public meetings was, "I cannot help it if you don't like my answer. It is the only one I can give." That response shows that officials had closed minds before the consultation.

I move on to the weaknesses of the current arrangements, and my hopes that the Government's plans will improve things. Community health councils have been variable and patchy in their distribution, although some have been superb. Whole counties and big cities have only one community health council. In Worcestershire, there are three community health councils for three different conurbations. I welcome the alternative, and I hope that the Minister will tell us that he has a better name for them than primary care trust patients forums. They will be consistent nationwide and will link with overview and scrutiny committees of local councils, so they have tremendous potential for allowing the citizen a voice. I hope that the Minister will tell us about the process of appointments to patients forums. I am a little alarmed about the cost because, whereas community health councils were relatively few in number, there will be many primary care trust patients forums.

I have had a helpful communication from the National Consumer Council about patients forums. I quote:

"It is essential that locally Patient Forums are equipped with the skills to gather quality information to enable them to work with decision-makers as partners . . . The CCPIH—

the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health—

"is to empower consumers to have a real say in decisions about service provision . . . so taking account of consumers' views becomes the norm."

Now that PCTs have so much power, after the crucial devolution, the post of non-executive director has become even more important than before. I hope that the new appointments system and the NHS appointments commission will remove the fear that so many directors have political allegiances. Hopefully, we will get strong, knowledgeable local people who can challenge the executives and represent local people in a way in which they have never been allowed to in the past, and who will not be tied by consensus management, pressurised from above, or even, in some cases, intimidated.

I shall briefly mention some of the issues that will arise in the future where meaningful public involvement is vital. The issue that is closest to my heart is obviously hospital reconfigurations. I welcome with tremendous enthusiasm last week's *Health Service Journal*, as it refers to a draft Department of Health framework on hospital reconfigurations that it somehow got hold of. The document, which has not yet been published, states that hospital reconfigurations must be based on "socially sustainable decision-making" and on services designed

"with local populations, not for them."

That accords well with a local lady who, referring to politicians in general, said "I do not elect a politician to tell me what I want." That is a very important comment. The framework document, we are told, continues:

"The priorities of communities will not always coincide with those of NHS managers and clinicians. Their views about the relative importance of risks, costs and benefits may differ."

That approach is vital, because as far as hospital reconfigurations are concerned, the terrible challenge of the European working time directive will threaten large and small hospitals alike. The report from the Royal College of Physicians on isolated acute medical services states that 46 hospitals in England alone probably cannot sustain acute medical services.

Health care rationing demands open debate with the public. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is the first brave attempt at that, and I am more than interested to hear about the progress of its attempts to involve patients and citizens. I would love to believe that citizens could be involved in the debate about the nurses' pay review. I do not know if that is living in cloud-cuckoo land, but the cost of agency nurses is ridiculous. I would love citizens to be involved in discussions on foundation hospitals. This morning, I received a communication from the Terrence Higgins Trust, stating:

"Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that the views of stigmatised and socially excluded groups can be heard."

Those are just some of the points, but there are many others to which involvement of the citizen is crucial.

To conclude, ordinary people are intelligent and have been disregarded for far too long. Problems in the NHS should be admitted. The Government must take people with them by being fully open, frank and honest, and by being able to respond to people's views even if they force the Government to change their mind. At this very moment, the British Medical Association is holding a consultative seminar with representatives of patient groups and professionals working in accident and emergency departments to identify and address areas of concern about access to

[Dr. Richard Taylor]

emergency care. The Government are very good with words, and I hope that the Minister will tell us that actions are being moulded to the words.

1.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I hope that it will not come as too much of a surprise to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) that I agree with much of what he said—I hope that that does not disappoint him. I probably start from probably the same position as him. He criticised existing arrangements and said that public involvement in the national heath service is not as good as it should be. The Government and I agree, which is why we proposed and implemented changes. The hon. Gentleman asked some specific questions, and I hope that I can answer them.

There is no better place to start than the hon. Gentleman's first remark—the national health service, of course, belongs to the public. They pay for it through general taxation and have the right to be fully involved with, and consulted on, the planning and delivery of local NHS services, as well as decisions on the best ways in which to improve them. I do not want to go into the long and painful history of developments in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but there is room for improvement in the way in which we ensure that change is effective in future.

A further problem is that when the NHS was set up—if one consults the history books—ownership was taken away from local communities. That was the basis on which many hospitals were put together. Ownership was instead invested in the state, which brought huge benefits, but there was a cost because a gulf grew between local communities and the way in which NHS services were run. Our challenge is to find a way to bridge that gap. Professor Kennedy, in his report on events at Bristol Royal infirmary, argued that patients should be inside the NHS rather than on the outside, as they often appear to be. Our proposals in the NHS plan and our response to the Kennedy report are designed to achieve that.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about community health councils. CHCs have been the principal mechanism for reflecting the public's interest in the NHS for nearly 30 years, and have done that job very well in many cases. However, CHCs have never empowered the public to speak for themselves or provided opportunities to that effect—that is not a criticism because it was never part of their remit. Modernisation of the NHS, centred on the needs and views of patients, which both the hon. Gentleman and I would like, requires mechanisms that enable systematic public involvement. Such a system should be proactive and not merely reactive, as present arrangements largely are. The system must work in partnership with the NHS, and should not always be pitched against the NHS. Patients forums, the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, and overview and scrutiny committees will replace community health councils. I hope that those new arrangements will ensure that the system to involve the public in the NHS will be more inclusive, proactive and democratic.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, Mrs. Sharon Grant has been appointed as chair designate of the new commission. I am very confident that she will make a hugely important contribution to its work, given her record of achievement and commitment. Mrs. Grant and her interim team are considering such issues as the core values under which the commission will operate, the different ways in which it could be structured, and staffing. The commission will start its formal work in January. The hon. Gentleman asked about the title of patients forums. I understand that Mrs. Grant wants to examine that—I am sure that she will have something to say about it.

One of the commission's first jobs will be to begin setting up patients forums throughout the country, and ensuring that patient and public involvement is consistent throughout the country. Patients forums will be made up of local volunteers who will monitor and review health services from a lay perspective. They will submit reports and recommendations to NHS managers, and a member of each forum will sit on the local trust board. The commission will organise the recruitment of volunteer members to forums and the recruitment of staff to forums to support their activities. I hope that the recruitment campaign for volunteers will target all corners of local communities. Some staff recruited to support forums will promote community involvement. Everywhere in the country there will be people with the capacity, inclination and skills to be effective members of patients forums. Many others will have something to say about the future of their local NHS, but will not know the best way to go about saying it. Some may not have the confidence or the opportunity to attend meetings.

It will be the job of community involvement staff to use existing community networks and visit different parts of the community to seek the views of the wider community. Where possible, they will take meetings to the people, and will work in innovative ways to ensure that as many people as possible can influence decisions. We will have to leave behind traditional ways of doing things as they have not always worked. In particular, we must look critically at the meetings culture. However, getting involved in decision-making processes is meaningless if the mechanisms for implementing decisions do not have teeth. It is one thing for a patients forum to make a series of recommendations to NHS manager, but that is futile if the NHS ignores what is said. In other words, the NHS must be more than just a good listener.

Not everyone will agree on the right way forward—I think that the hon. Gentleman cited a document on that issue, to which I shall refer in a moment. Trusts will not always be able to react positively to recommendations, but the flip side is that forums have the right to expect a proper response and explanation from trusts. Fundamentally, the NHS will need to treat the new forums as equal partners. Both sets of partners will have to work hard to ensure that they are viewed in that way—as a resource, not an obstacle.

We are not only empowering people directly, but providing new powers so that democratically elected members of local authorities can have real influence

over the NHS. The Health and Social Care Act 2001 gave new powers to the overview and scrutiny committees of local authorities to review and scrutinise the planning, operation and development of local health services. I hope that that will tackle directly the lack of local accountability by ensuring that democratically elected representatives with responsibility, as a matter of law, for the well-being of local people have influence over the NHS.

To facilitate health scrutiny by local councillors, the Act places three key obligations on the NHS: to provide information to overview and scrutiny committees; to consult on the substantial variation and development of services; and for senior NHS officials to attend meetings to explain decisions. On top of the new scrutiny powers there is a specific right of referral to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health where an overview and scrutiny committee contests either the adequacy of public involvement and consultation or the merits of proposals for change.

Public interest is highest when proposals are made to reconfigure local services. The hon. Gentleman drew on his own experiences in making that point. The NHS plan committed the Government to establishing an independent reconfiguration panel to consider contested proposals. Where a referral is made, the Secretary of State may seek the advice of the panel, which will be made up of key stakeholders, a third of whom will be patient representatives. We expect to confirm the panel's membership shortly, but its work must be seen in the context of our undertaking to develop a framework to address service reconfigurations—the hon. Gentleman also spoke on that subject.

The forces that historically have underlined the need for reconfiguration of NHS services are well known, not least to the hon. Gentleman, who has had a distinguished career in the NHS. Patient safety, technological change and affordability have tended to act as centralising forces in the past, and we must carefully reconsider all those issues from the patient's perspective and experience, remembering people's strong wish to retain the best possible local access to the highest quality services as close to home as possible. The best solutions have a number of common factors, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We should design services with local people, not for them. In west Cornwall, for example, the NHS, the local authority and local people have united around an idea for developing services to meet local people's needs and maintain access to locally based services. They are working in partnership to put the new model of care in place, and we are providing them with financial support to do so.

We should take a whole-system view. Hospitals are more effective and stronger if they work in partnership than in isolation—I agree with the hon. Gentleman about that. Merged clinical teams permit far more flexibility in the way in which services are provided. There should be an emphasis on redesign, not relocation. The experience with service and work force redesign shows that alternative models of care can be developed to deliver safe, effective care for patients, and we should explore all those avenues. Patient safety must, however, come first. Innovations such as the local medical emergency unit in Cornwall, of which the hon. Gentleman is aware, need thorough testing before they can be implemented more widely. Smaller-scale innovations such as extended roles and clinical networks are already working well in many places.

The aim of our work on those issues is to help the NHS to get it right first time. The framework to which the hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention will assist, or seek to assist, the process of decision making at local level by offering signposts for the future and by helping local communities to develop innovative and sustainable service models that are supported by local populations. We expect to publish that framework in the very near future, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be the first to write to me about it.

Section 11 of the Health and Social Care Act places a new duty on the NHS to make arrangements to involve and consult the public on decisions to be taken about changes to local services. It will come into effect in the new year and underpins new arrangements for patient and public involvement across the country. It will enable members of trusts to whom involvement is second nature to capitalise on their good experience, and will bring up to speed those trusts for which it has not been such a high priority. It will give more people the chance to get involved.

Promoting a "Trust me, I'm a patient" culture is a real challenge. For many in the NHS, involving patients and the public in decision-making processes will mean changing the way in which they work. I believe that that is the right thing to do. To ignore the views and experiences of patients and the public would be to ignore the biggest pool of expertise available to the NHS. I accept that involving patients and the public in the decision-making processes of the NHS is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity that we should seize with both hands.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the big challenge posed by compliance with the European working time directive. It is an opportunity rather than a threat—we should look at it in that context. We have worked closely with the royal medical colleges, the British Medical Association and others to find the right combination of measures to ensure that we do not, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, face an unacceptable range of solutions that would take people further away from local services. I do not believe that anyone would want that, as there are solutions at hand.

We will have to examine critically arrangements for cross cover and [illegible] arrangements for staffing on-call rotas. Skill mix [illegible] NHS—the classic question of who does what, and why it must be done in a particular way—is a significant challenge. There are opportunities for us to re-examine the way in which we provide services. Compliance with the European working time directive will not provide a fig leaf, as it were, or an excuse for wholesale service reclassification. Neither I nor my constituents want that. If there is one baseline test that we as right hon. and hon. Members should always set ourselves when examining NHS issues, it is

[Mr. John Hutton]

whether a policy will work for our constituencies, and whether it is the right thing to do for the people whom we represent. That is my approach to such issues.

I believe—I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the hon. Gentleman agree—that the NHS is a public service. It does not belong to me, or to any of us in the House, but to the public, who support it strongly and pay for it through their wallets. The public have an absolute entitlement to expect that the service delivered to them meets their local needs. That is our objective.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A very constructive and interesting debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 6 November 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Cancer Networks

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

9.30 am

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): This morning's debate on cancer networks is rather appropriate, as the all-party group on cancer is holding a major conference called "Britain against cancer" not far from here in the Queen Elizabeth II Centre. The first day of the conference has been exceptionally successful. The participants have interacted well and have discussed major problems. They believe that progress is being made in the delivery of better services to treat cancer, but the point of today's debate is to discuss what more we can do to assist that progress along the pathways that we all want.

I shall begin with a little history of cancer and its treatment. In 1995, Calman-Hine produced a report with the objective of creating a network of care in England and Wales that would enable patients, wherever they live, to be sure that the treatment and care that they receive is of a uniformly high standard. The report contained several principles around which the delivery of cancer care should be built. It stated that all patients should enjoy access to high-quality care, that care should be provided as close to patients' homes as possible, and that patients, their families and carers should be given clear information about their condition so that they can understand treatment options and outcomes.

The previous Government set the ball rolling. In September 2000, however, this Government signalled a major change by publishing the first comprehensive report for improving cancer care in England, which went much further than the Calman-Hine report. The national health service cancer plan brought together prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment and research, and set out the Government's plans for future investment in cancer treatment and care. New funding of some £570 million a year extra was provided to support the plan. Clearly, delivering better health services in this country is a major priority. Cancer care is at the forefront, and the Government are demonstrating how to deliver it.

The Government recognised that the quality of cancer care varies throughout England and Wales. In some areas, it rivals the best in the world; in others, it is in urgent need of improvement. Some serious problems need to be addressed—out-of-date equipment, too few cancer specialists, geographical variations in access to treatment, and poor communication with patients. The aim, which we would all endorse, is to save more lives and to ensure that people with cancer receive the right professional support and care as well as the best treatments throughout their cancer journey.

Tackling inequalities in cancer survival rates needs to be a glorious ambition. Among the problems that the plan addressed was the need to invest in specialist staff, research and preparation for the genetics revolution that is with us now, and to adapt to all the major changes taking place. There were commitments to reduce smoking rates and waiting times, and to improve access to hospitals, hospices and palliative care. Since the publication of that plan, we have seen initiatives such as a ban on tobacco advertising, an extension of breast cancer screening programmes, a national fruit scheme, and investment in primary care with GPs at the forefront with responsibility for cancer services.

We have also seen investment in research. The National Cancer Research Institute has already started to develop strategic plans on how we fund world-class research in this country. Nobel prize winners pour out almost daily as a result of the work that is going on. I predict that there will be more, such as David Lane of the university of Dundee, who, at this very moment, is speaking in the Queen Elizabeth II Centre. His work on a particular oncogene is very important in developing new strategies to tackle the rogue cells of cancer.

Much is happening. There have been improvements in information for patients and in drug assessment and analysis by the Commission for Health Improvement. There have also been visits to different hospitals to look at cancer services and monitor what is happening. Indeed, there is so much activity in this area that it has almost become a paradigm for other services in the health service. Mental health services will build on the back of our experience, and I believe that heart disease services will do the same. We are at the forefront and things are happening, but that activity must be considered in the context of the strategy and the plan for what we are trying to achieve.

One in three people in the United Kingdom will be diagnosed with cancer, and one in four will die of it. At yesterday's conference, Peter Boyle, an epidemiologist of great distinction, presented figures that clearly show that the incidence of, and mortality from, breast cancer and the other major cancers have been gradually decreasing over the past five or six years in Britain. As a result, there is a real feeling that some of the things being done are beginning to pay off in the form of improving rates. It is perhaps not surprising that in other countries, such as Spain, Portugal and Greece, there have been amazing increases in the incidences of cancer. We can all guess the reasons for that; they include smoking, diet and other habits.

We have taken an amazing step forward, but my aim in this debate is to ask, as is my wont, whether we can do more and better. How do we move the situation on? It is no use saying that we have done it all, sitting back and hoping that things will happen. The work force is enthusiastic and determined, although there may not be enough people in certain areas. In a poll at the conference, more than 60 per cent. of the 500 or more people there said that things had got better, which must be music to the ears of some of our friends in Downing street who have to think up these slogans. There is some proof that something is beginning to happen.

However, more could be done in many areas. I do not want to talk about passive smoking, but it is clear that moves are being made on that. There is no definite evidence that passive smoking causes certain types of

[Dr. Ian Gibson]

cancer, but there is a suspicion and more work needs to be done. We have started to think about our diets, and more needs to be done on that with the industry. Perhaps companies should be compelled to watch what they put in foods, particularly those given to our young people in school dinners.

Habits and cultures will take time to change, but the process is beginning. I doubt that we will get rid immediately of the culture in Scotland of pizza and chips and everything being fried in batter. That will take a few years, but even the Scots will come round in the end.

I want to concentrate on cancer networks, because they are the organisational model for cancer services to implement the cancer plan, to which I referred. They bring together health service commissioners—health authorities, primary care groups and trusts—and providers, which comprise primary community care groups, hospitals, the voluntary sector and local authorities. Bringing together that group of people, with all the differences in personality and style, is difficult and therefore a real achievement.

I guess that the 34 cancer networks are moving at different speeds, and no doubt some of my colleagues will wish to talk about that. Throughout the country, the networks are working to consider prevention, diagnosis, screening, supportive care, specialist palliative care and so on. I think that they are meant to have reviewed their service provision by now and identified where they need to develop and invest for the future. I challenge my hon. Friend the Minister to say whether all 34 networks have produced their plans, whether they are up and running, and whether there are different tiers or speeds. If there are, what can we do to make them all move at the speed and level of the best?

This is about establishing a patient partnership. Patients have taken centre stage in the NHS. Everyone wants to involve them and their carers in decision making on shaping services, particularly cancer treatment. We shall reform delivery systems by asking people in the networks to collaborate and initiate things in new, fresh and exciting ways. The United States is rather good at that, but we have not been very good at it in many walks of life.

Recently, 17 cancer groups got together. They were from the care and cancer charities, and drug companies such as Aventis and Eli Lilly. One is often cynical about drug companies, thinking that they are interested only in making profits. That is okay but, surprisingly, they have also said in a statement that there should be

"sufficient resources to support the further development of cancer user partnership groups in the 34 Cancer Service Networks in England and similar initiatives across the UK."

In each network, the individual tumour-specific working groups—colo-rectal, breast and so forth—are examining how to develop their programmes. Patients need to be involved fully, not just on an ad hoc basis. To enhance public and patient involvement, patient representatives should sit on the individual working parties as well as the networks.

A Department of Health official, Harry Cayton, well known for his work in the Alzheimer's Society, heartened me yesterday when he stressed the importance of three simple messages about patients. The most important was "Trust me, I'm a patient. Listen to me. Please tell me the truth about my condition and don't do anything without involving me." That is the spirit of the age and we have to try to deliver it through the networks. The determination and involvement of patients will enrich the networks' work.

Each network covers about 2 million people. Evidence suggests that they may be moving at different speeds. On 19 December 2001, *Hansard* recorded that the national health service planning and performance framework required the national health service organisations to work together through the cancer networks to deliver the cancer programme in line with the strategic plans of each of the networks. Everything is in place; the words are written; the people are there. How is it all working out?

We heard evidence yesterday of good work in the Avon, Somerset and Wiltshire cancer network. The secret is that people there are talking together and the important people who deliver the services and carry the cheque books also attend the meetings. They know about the spirit at loose there and that many positive developments are taking place.

I shall refer to some of the issues reported at yesterday's conference. Because the Avon, Somerset and Wiltshire network receives funding from the health authorities, it has five research nurses, five data managers, a research co-ordinator, pharmacy support and additional equipment. It plans to double recruitment by 2004 and to invest more in education and support for all research staff. I suspect that it is the best network in the country: it is working and doing well. It would be good to see it doing even better.

The networks throughout the country also meet and talk to each other through the cancer services collaborative: they audit each other and discuss best practice among themselves. That reveals the positive indicators. We have seen quite a few success stories and I should like to hear colleagues telling me more about success stories in their networks.

Two further initiatives are required. I am sorry to be a bore on cancer again, but I remain committed to a national cancer Act in this country, akin to that in the US, which is currently being revised. It has proved the key to delivering support to all the cancer services in the US: it is the model that we should follow for the next stage of our cancer strategy. I argued in favour of that in a 10-minute Bill in May this year.

It is great to have a national cancer director—the so-called tsar—and Mike Richards has done a sterling job across the country, stimulating and organising the services. But why just one? Why not also have, as the Americans would say, a quarter-back in every network? It would be good to have more tsar-type leaders with the authority to drive and push forward the agenda.

The time has truly come for a national cancer Act, which would ensure that funding is delivered into cancer services year-in, year-out. Services must not be allowed to stutter because of lack of resources.

I chair the Select Committee on Science and Technology. As the Minister knows, we investigated where the extra investment in cancer services has gone. I am unsure how the Minister will react in reply, but we stimulated awareness of the fact that the money does not always get to the coal face, to the people who need it.

However, that is not quite true. Current evidence shows that at least some of it is getting through to the coal face, and that people are seeing a difference. I do not believe that 60 per cent. of people would say that there was a difference unless they had seen a change, so some of the money is getting there.

However, we need an audit trail of that money so that when we say that it is going to a particular target, it reaches the cancer service that we want it to. Sadly, health authorities can use some of the money to meet wage increases and pay off debts. That is not good enough. If we are to deliver the cancer service that we know is possible, we need to ensure that that money gets through.

Again, at the conference yesterday, when the question was asked and the keypads were pushed, more than 60 per cent. of people agreed that the money was not getting through. I was heartened that 70 per cent. also said that they wanted a national cancer Act, so I have some support for that at present, even if it does not last. I see in the Gallery today that there are people from various networks throughout the country that are doing fine work. It is important that the people from networks, as well as those at the conference and practitioners, agree with me that much of the money that is given to cancer services by the Government is not getting through. Will the Minister assure us that the audit trail is being sharpened up?

We should ask why the radical and bold solution of giving the money straight to the cancer networks should not be adopted. If the people in those networks are doing a good job, and know the priorities in their areas, they will know what is most important and will take decisions on that basis.

The Government are determined to make sure that decisions are taken as close to the point of delivery as possible. This is a real opportunity to do what has been done so brilliantly in schools. Giving head teachers, who may not agree with what I am about to say, a sum of money, say £150,000 or £30,000, sends a strong message to them. It says that they can choose whether to use that money to hire a teacher or a classroom assistant, to put up a partition or to sort out the playground, and they know that they will receive that money every year, so they can plan on that basis. I believe that all cancer networks would engage much more sharply if they had a sum of money about which to decide in their locality so that they could be seen to be delivering for local people. There is no doubt that money brings influence, and I ask the Minister to consider that radical move.

The Government must preside over the resources and monitor the work that takes place. I should like the assurance that all the networks are being examined, and that those that are lagging behind are asked the reasons for that—whether it is leadership or some other factor that means that they are not delivering in the way in which, for example, Avon has.

We must be bold and radical. Our health service is on its way to delivering the best cancer services in the world. The messages that we receive and the lessons that we learn from that area will impinge on our delivery of the mental health Act when it is eventually considered in this place. I am enthused and excited by what we have done. I would not have expected, during my lifetime, to have reached the stage that we have attained during the past three or four years. The 500 people at the conference who represent people throughout the country feel the same.

The debate and the issues have changed. We are enthusiastic, perhaps too much so, but if that is the case, the Minister will no doubt slow us down.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I draw hon. Members' attention to the grammatically challenged notice on the Annunciator, and assure them that we are not under orders to evacuate at present. We are cleared to continue.

9.48 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Indeed, there is quite a to-do outside with the fire brigade all over the place.

May I say what a privilege it is to follow the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who modestly said that he never would have believed that in his lifetime the pace of change would have increased so much in the House? I am glad that he does not represent Leicestershire because I would probably have to campaign against him. He has made a great contribution to cancer care from the Back Benches, and has relentlessly driven that agenda. It is a pleasure for me to follow him. It will be no surprise to hon. Members that I will focus on an area that I have focused on for most of my 15 years in the House and consider some of the complementary aspects of health care for cancer. The Minister's task would be infinitely easier if she were to take more account of the 60,000 complementary practitioners, who generally work in the private sector, and who are always prepared to help cancer patients.

I was struck by what the hon. Gentleman said about the 34 cancer networks. What an opportunity they provide to roll out some of the care listed in the wonderful directory of complementary therapy services in UK cancer care, which is published by Macmillan Cancer Relief. He said that he could not believe how far the cancer treatment movement has come in a few years, and I, too, find it hard to believe how the wind has got behind the complementary movement. The Government themselves are taking some of these issues seriously, perhaps because they have been raised relentlessly and repeatedly in the Chamber. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) smiles, as he always does, which is a good thing. Perhaps he is agreeing with me—we shall find out soon.

It is instructive to go to the directory, which lists available treatments on every page. I shall read one or two passages, although I know that we must not read out too much, as I have been called to order in the Chamber in the past and I will not make the same mistake again. The directory quotes a cancer patient who states:

"It's acupuncture that's helped me to cope with the chemo".

That is very true. A patient who took part in a relaxation therapy group said:

"I've learnt to carry on the relaxation at home too. I sleep better and don't get so worked up."

Another patient said:

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"When I first decided to ask for healing"—

therapeutic touch, the transmission of energy through a person who is trained to do it, usually because they are able to focus on light—

"I had no idea what to expect. When it started, I began to calm down a little."

The patient now feels much better. A lady who was treated with aromatherapy said:

"I went in as one woman and came out as another".

Roy, a patient describing reflexology, said

"I sleep really well now. I am so relaxed afterwards."

A great friend of mine was diagnosed as suffering from cancer by a reflexologist in the private sector who simply said, "I can sense that you've got a major problem." My friend went in for emergency treatment and has survived.

If the Minister can draw these therapies progressively towards the health services it will make her life in trying to deliver a health service on which there are ever increasing demands that much easier. When respectable organisations are involved in producing this type of directory—Michelle Kohn has done so much with Macmillan Cancer Relief—the Government must sit up, take notice and think closely and carefully about what the different treatments can do.

I now want to draw hon. Members' attention to Chinese medicine, which is going through a process of regulation, which I welcome. There are many shops throughout the country where people purport to do things that they are not necessarily doing. There have been some scares about Aristolochia, which we all know about, and it is right to move towards regulation. However, there also needs to be a better rollout in the health service, because the pain relief that acupuncture can provide is desperately important for cancer patients.

The use of Chinese herbs is also important in arresting cancer symptoms and keep PSA—prostate-specific antigen—levels down. It may help hon. Members to think of Chinese medical herbs as being like the Whips Office, because they work in the same way: there is a chief herb—

Dr. Gibson: Does the hon. Gentleman mean poison?

Mr. Tredinnick: We hope to avoid the Aristolochia effect. The hon. Gentleman refers to his own Whips, and I will not prejudice his career, as no doubt they are listening.

There is an assistant, or deputy, herb and a messenger, which all work together and help each other. Chinese medicine is fantastically powerful in prevention. The Government should take much more notice of that.

I have referred to acupuncture. There is also homeopathy, a hugely important range of treatments that is available to everyone now. A couple of weekends ago I presented the homeopathic awards at the Society of Homeopaths for those who had trained over four years. Then there is the whole healing movement. The Minister should also be aware of other simple devices that can go a long way towards relieving pain. One example is this transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation machine. It sends an electronic current from one part of a limb to another and is very effective in dealing with acute pain.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that aids of that kind are not normally brought into our proceedings.

Mr. Tredinnick: I have never sought to invoke aids that are forbidden in Parliament. I apologise. What I was hoping to demonstrate, which I now will be unable to do, was a simple TENS machine. Other pieces of equipment are coming on the market now, which look very similar and contain the frequencies of up to 20,000 homeopathic medicines. By connecting them to a wrist strap it is possible for the person to invoke the signature of that remedy and the body automatically interacts with it. It has been developed by a scientist. This is looking at the horizon. This is where I think we will be going in future.

Another area on which the Minister should focus more carefully is the whole healing movement. The group of people who have perhaps done the most with the least recognition for those suffering from cancer, particularly in hospices, are those in the healing movement, the therapeutic touch people. Whether or not one believes in channelled energy or in the results of the extensive trials that have been carried out, anyone who has had it will generally notice an effect of heat going through hands. Such treatment is very effective in reducing symptoms and bringing about well-being. It can give someone who is on their way out an extension of life. I should also like to pay tribute to Lucy Bell and her cancer care team at Charing Cross and Hammersmith hospitals. They well illustrate how complementary therapies can and should be combined in the cancer networks. This successful practice uses massage, aromatherapy, reflexology, relaxation and even an art therapy to treat patients. Its results have been demonstrable and significant.

Let me turn to more general health service issues, but still within the context of cancer care. I have always thought that one of the Government's fundamental problems is that they do not focus enough on preventive medicine. The hon. Member for Norwich, North touched on the issue of diet, which is crucial. We should pay more attention to the problems of obesity and lack of exercise. I welcome the new parliamentary groups that are springing up to address these issues.

The Government should be persuaded to make more of an effort to encourage people to take responsibility for their own health, for example using these little machines. The other machine with the homeopathic remedies that I was going to demonstrate looks very similar to the TENS machine. If people tried homeopathic remedies, which they can now get over the counter at chemists, it would reduce the pressure on doctors' surgeries. If that 5 per cent. of so-called heart-sink patients could be got away from the surgeries, there would be a better turnover of patients who can most likely receive effective treatment. About 5 million people in this country regularly use the treatments that I have described, not just cancer patients.

There is a fundamental problem of staff shortages in the health services. The Government spend £300 million a year on agency staff to fill the gaps. I am not saying

that complementary therapists can fill all those gaps, but a more effective use of therapists in hospitals would take the pressure off hard-pressed nurses and help improve patients' health.

Regulation has been mentioned. The Government are supporting the efforts of the Foundation for Integrated Health to draw together the various representative bodies of complementary health care. I pay tribute, in particular, to the work of Professor Pittillo, not to be confused with my right hon. Friend who has been in the news recently.

Dr. Gibson: Are you supporting him?

Mr. Tredinnick: I shall not be sidetracked down that path.

The speedy introduction of regulation would be most welcome, and it would be worth while in the long term if the Minister could find a small amount of money with which to speed up the process. We need to complete the regulation of Chinese and herbal medicine, as well as of aromatherapy. Then doctors would find it easier to make referrals, because they would feel less threatened.

That leads me to the training of doctors. There has been a welcome move in medical schools to ensure that newly trained doctors are made more aware of the important issues. Every year, 5 million prescriptions for painkillers are issued at a cost of £265 million. Furthermore, £370 million of health service money is spent on painkillers in supermarket pharmacies. Treatment of the side effects of painkillers costs the NHS between £170 million and £350 million. The Government should focus on those costs and consider the alternatives that are available, such as acupuncture or methods recommended by the healing movement, represented by the Confederation of Healing Organisations. In that way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government would find it easier to meet patients' demands as well as their own targets.

Mr. James Cran (in the Chair): For the avoidance of doubt, I am not Mr. Deputy Speaker, but merely Mr. Cran.

Mr. Tredinnick: On a point of order, Mr. Cran. I was under the impression that, in this Chamber, it was our duty to call you Mr. Deputy Speaker regardless.

Mr. James Cran (in the Chair): No, it should be Mr. Cran.

10.2 am

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I thank the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) for providing us with a new insight. I now know that the role of the Government Whips Office is to add a little flavour to our dull lives in this place.

I endorse the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) about cancer networks, cancer centres and the cancer Act. Now that we have them, we can say that cancer networks are obviously a good thing—the wisdom of hindsight is marvellous—but we cannot prove it because there have been no double-blind trials to show how much the cancer networks contribute to the improvement of cancer survival rates. However, it would defy logic if they did not help because the reasons for their effectiveness are obvious. Nevertheless, they have not always been obvious to the public or to general practitioners, and there is a substantial job to be done educating people.

That is one of the reasons why I support a national cancer Act, which would bring the matter firmly to the public attention and to the attention of all those in the health service who have not yet got the message. The Department of Health is reluctant to select disease areas for special treatment, but there is a case for doing so with cancer, which is uniquely biologically complex. Furthermore, it can be regarded as a paradigm for all health care: if one achieves success with cancer, one can transfer the methods and organisational and scientific approaches that one uses, and massive parts of the knowledge that one gains, to the rest of health care. One can then raise standards throughout.

It is obvious that centres of excellence with full multidisciplinary teams to cover all the areas of specialisation relevant to cancer promote interaction and the more rapid development of clinical procedures. They also promote better results for patients, which is the key to it all—if patients benefit, our approach must be right. That is the way to proceed, and it is increasingly recognised across medicine that people who encounter more cases—whether surgeons, oncologists or whatever—will provide more efficient and quicker treatment, with better results. It is as basic as that.

There must also be a concentration of heavy physical facilities, such as imaging equipment, which is becoming increasingly expensive, and radiotherapy equipment. We cannot spread such equipment around, with isolated machines in different general hospitals; we must concentrate facilities in regional centres for sheer cost-effectiveness—we should never forget the importance of cost-effectiveness in delivering a health service. All the logic therefore points to cancer centres, with a collaborative network around them; they are the obvious way to proceed.

I wish that I could say that that view was universally appreciated, but local experience tells me that it is not. It is not appreciated by local elected representatives in Sussex, by all doctors or by all members of the public. I am glad to have in my constituency a general hospital, which is about to become a teaching hospital. It is also a regional cancer centre. It is still developing, and it has quite a long way to go. It ran into a problem, however, because it is on an awful site and it has grown like Topsy in a place where, ideally, it should not be. One day, the trust's chief executive suddenly thought, "Oh dear! Under phase 2 of the development plan the portakabin that houses the breast assessment centre needs to be moved. Where shall we put it? Oh dear, we can't find anywhere. Oh well, we've got a sister hospital in Haywards Heath; let's build a new breast cancer unit there." In other words, the plan was to remove facilities for treating the most common single form of cancer from the cancer centre. All medical practice and logic tells us that that is nonsense, but that was the idea, although it started as a purely administrative device. Fortunately, another site was chosen 20 ft away; it is just over the road from the main cancer centre, so it is perfect. However, there was an incredibly parochial campaign by people from the hinterland of mid-Sussex

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and Haywards Heath who wanted their own centre of excellence. They clearly had not understood the simple message that one should concentrate services for specialist areas such as cancer if one wants results. Had those people succeeded, cancer patients in Sussex would have been the sufferers in the long term because the service would probably—I believe undoubtedly—not have been as good as the service that will now be maintained in Brighton, although that cannot be proved. There would have been a loss for patients: in cancer cases, they would have died—the issue is as basic as that.

The message still needs to be drummed home to the public that that is the way that matters are developing. The message also needs to be drummed into GPs, although that is not a universal criticism. I am a member of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, and when we were doing our cancer report, we were made aware of the variability of knowledge of cancer among GPs. In the first instance, patients go to their GP. If they are lucky and their GP recognises the signs and refers them, that is all right, although that does not necessarily happen. All too many patients go for many months presenting with cancer symptoms and being misdiagnosed. Although cancer is very common—one in three of us will at some time be diagnosed with cancer—the individual GP does not see that many cancer patients in a given year. GPs need a lot of support and education if they are to play their part in the cancer networks, and benefit patients.

The principle of the cancer network is a good paradigm for other specialist areas. The time has long passed when we could expect every district general hospital to do everything. Life has become more complicated and problems more specialised. There are fields for which the equivalent of cancer networks and cancer centres are appropriate. Cardiology is an obvious example—I am happy to say that there is a cardiology centre in my constituency also. Some types of surgery are appropriate for that approach. I would nominate orthopaedics. Orthopaedic surgeons who do a lot of hip replacements on a factory basis produce magnificent results. Those who do one once in a blue moon inevitably do not produce quite the same results. It is best to centre developing technologies so that there is the throughput to make them work effectively. Neurosurgery is another complex surgical field in which the same approach is inevitable.

Cancer networks are a leading example of a principle that we should apply carefully throughout acute health provision. We should not expect every district general hospital to specialise in everything. In a given district, one may nominate one district general hospital to be the leading centre for a given medical condition. In the long term, that will lead to more effective and efficient health care and better outcomes for patients. Cancer networks are leading the way. I ask the Minister not to reject out of hand the notion of a national cancer Act, because it has a lot to offer.

10.13 am

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson). As other hon. Members have said, he has made a great contribution to the debate on this subject in the House and elsewhere. On a personal note, I want to thank him for his interest in the development of my thinking on the matter since I came to the House. I am a relatively new Member, and I am grateful to him for the time that he has spent ensuring that I understand what is happening.

The Government published their NHS cancer plan in September 2000. It acknowledged that cancer treatment, although excellent in places, was not of the same high quality or accessibility for all patients. Ten years ago, services were fragmented, as Professor Peter Boyle suggested yesterday in his speech at the "Britain against cancer" conference, hosted by the all-party parliamentary group on cancer. There was no national guidance and there were no multi-disciplinary teams, except in breast cancer.

Cancer networks were expected to take responsibility for implementing the NHS cancer plan. Health authorities, primary care trusts and service providers would have to work together to plan for the investment in cancer services needed to implement the network strategy. The cancer plan set clear targets for cancer networks. By 2001, they were expected to develop strategic service delivery plans to cover all aspects of cancer services. In the document, those aspects were defined as prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, supportive care, and specialist palliative care. Again by 2001, the networks were expected to have developed underpinning strategies on work force, education and training, and cancer facilities. Emerging network plans were expected to be reflected in health improvement plans and service and financial frameworks by 2001.

It is now 2002 and 34 cancer networks are in place, but there is a vast difference in the level of implementation achieved. Yesterday, we heard that the Avon, Somerset and Wiltshire network seemed to be working as a joint enterprise, although it was a little unhappy about the word "seemed". Clearly, it has come a long way. It serves a population of 2.1 million people, with seven trusts, two strategic health authorities, 12 PCTs, five hospices and 65 groups from the voluntary sector.

When a network is pulled together, no doubt the commitment of professionals, support staff and those in the voluntary sector—including those involved in complementary medicine and hospices—can be harnessed to produce a sum greater than the parts, and to improve services for patients. However, the Greater Manchester and Cheshire network, which serves more than 3 million people in my area, has only just got going. When preparing for the debate, I thought that there was nowhere better to start than my own area. I was surprised that I knew nothing of the cancer network that served Cheadle; having been a patient, I have a particular interest. I searched the cancer network website, and found only the name and associated trusts, so that network has a long way to catch up.

In "The NHS Cancer Plan: Making Progress", which was published by the Department of Health in 2001, the Government claimed that progress was being made on faster treatment. However, they failed to publish any statistics on efforts to meet the treatment targets. A

parliamentary answer to my hon. Friend on 11 February 2002 suggested that the Government did not know whether they had met the target set for December 2001 of a maximum one-month wait for breast cancer treatment. It is also clear that the Government drive for patients to be seen within two weeks does not reduce anxiety when treatment takes more than three months to arrange.

The Avon, Somerset and Wiltshire network has put patients at the centre of the service. The intention must be to provide a seamless service for patients, who have enough to cope with being ill and having to face treatments that are at least unpleasant. Although doctors and nurses work hard within the resources available, too often it can appear that hospitals and services are run around the needs of the service providers. Cancelled clinics are the norm. Patients trail all over the hospital site or from clinic to clinic, clutching inadequate information. Tests are delayed.

In a Government survey of cancer patients published in 2002 and based on data collected between 1999 and 2000, 16 per cent. of patients could not understand all or most of doctors' answers to questions about cancer, 10 per cent. had to wait seven months between diagnosis and treatment and a further 16 per cent. had to wait between three and six months. Among prostate cancer patients, 22 per cent. had to wait for seven months, while 87 per cent. of all patients had to wait for more than a month between noticing symptoms and being treated, 21 per cent. for seven months. Nursing needs on discharge from hospital were not even discussed with 37 per cent. of patients.

In my experience, patients' suggestions are often treated as complaints. A hospital with which I was involved had a policy of phoning patients to ask whether they were satisfied with their treatment. I said that I was, but that I had some suggestions and that I would write in with them. I did that—they were simple and patient-focused, but I received a reply that said that if I wished to make a formal complaint, the hospital would be happy for me to send it in. I considered throwing it in the bin, but decided to write back to say that I was not complaining but answering the question about whether there could have been improvements in the treatment, and when I did so there was a sudden assumption that I was making a complaint. I was not; I was simply making helpful suggestions and I wanted to hear that the hospital authorities were going to take notice of them. Sadly, that did not happen.

As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, Harry Cayton said yesterday that patients need to be listened to. The vast majority of patients are supportive of their doctors and nurses and of the national health service. They recognise how hard the professionals are working just to stand still. The complaints system treats patients as nuisances to be worn down with lengthy, unnecessary procedures that leave those without stamina exhausted and frustrated and those with stamina angrier than when they started. The Liberal Democrats believe that the NHS can be reformed—our vision is of an NHS that is decentralised, easily able to adapt to the needs of local people and accountable. Cancer networks should provide strategic development plans to ensure that the hard work and commitment of the professionals is supported with up-to-date equipment, trained support staff and a streamlined service to patients.

For there to be accountability, there must be clarity about where funding goes. The Liberal Democrats are concerned about the health service's culture of secrecy about how funds are allocated and diverted between budget headings. Even health professionals are not convinced about whether cancer moneys have reached the services for which they were intended. As the hon. Gentleman said earlier, at yesterday's all-party cancer conference, 14.1 per cent. thought that the moneys were reaching the services for which they were intended, but 41.6 per cent. said that they were not and a further 44.2 per cent. did not know. That was a poll of people who were mainly health professionals and volunteers supporting those with cancer. Nearly 86 per cent. of the people who should know best what is happening either do not know or think that funds have been diverted. The Government should be very worried by that statistic.

Lack of co-ordination is at its most stark in research into the prevention and cure of cancer. Prevention should be at the forefront of research, yet I hear of the struggle in my area to obtain funding for research into the lifestyle causes of breast cancer—work on exercise and diet that could give much-needed pointers to the one in nine women who need to reduce their risk of getting the disease.

Those at the Europa Donna lecture last week heard from Dr. Martine Piccart, a consultant oncologist, who referred to the lack of co-ordination in chemotherapy research trials. In far too many duplicated studies, the same questions are being asked of far too many people; what is needed is different questions and a pooling of information.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a national cancer Act. The Liberal Democrats would not oppose such an Act, but we would want it to be clear about what was envisaged—and especially whether it would produce more centralisation and prescription rather than enabling local areas to take responsibility for local matters.

We do not believe that tsars are an answer; the very word has almost come to mean that those areas that appoint one will probably not get the attention that they deserve. Resources should support those who deliver the service, and I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman that there needs to be a transparent audit trail, showing how the resources get to where they are needed.

The hon. Members for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) and for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner)—the latter has left the Chamber—spoke of complementary medicine. We very much support complementary medicine, but it should be exactly that—complementary to the support given by recognised, acknowledged and tested treatments. It undoubtedly brings great benefits to patients and should be part of the seamless service on offer to patients.

The Liberal Democrats have supported the vision of cancer networks since the cancer national services framework was published in 2000. The networks have the potential to offer patients modern, streamlined services that reflect local priorities and local needs. Health service professionals provide excellent service when they can, but their work is frustrated by poor resources, and inadequate buildings and equipment. They have to run in order to stand still. Cancer networks could provide them with the opportunity to work

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smarter rather than harder. However, two years on there is still a long way to go before patients will see sustained benefits. I hope that the Minister will tell us how she expects to inject fresh drive into areas such as mine that have only just started.

10.27 am

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): First, I add my congratulations to those already expressed to the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson). It is with a sense of déjà vu that we debate cancer in this Chamber, because the hon. Gentleman is always here even if he has not instigated the debate. He has a fantastic track record on the subject, and it is a shame that more hon. Members are not here this morning. I presume that they are at the Queen Elizabeth II centre attending the conference that he has organised.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) on her performance on the Liberal Democrat Front Bench. I am sure that we shall cross swords on many occasions on health as well as other subjects.

As usual, the hon. Member for Norwich, North made some interesting points. He is right that much progress on cancer care has been made over the past few years, but there are still many gaps and much progress still needs to be made. The hon. Gentleman is quite rightly always pressing the Minister—as we all do—for more. However, there are still enormous inequalities in cancer survival rates throughout the country, which compares badly with countries on the continent. Indeed, from the examples that he gave, Scotland may be the toughest nut to crack.

The hon. Gentleman's idea for a family of cancer tsars is slightly alarming. The Government already have more tsars than the Romanovs ever had in Russia—and, taking after that country, the Government have already started to give some of them the metaphorical bullet. It is not necessary to add to the fleets of tsars—or tsarettes—in order to put them in charge of cancer networks.

Mr. Tredinnick: Tsarinas.

Tim Loughton: A tsarina is a female tsar. A tsarette is a little tsar of either sex. It would be difficult to see that as a universal panacea for what might be going on in cancer care.

I agree that we need to sharpen up the audit trail—and I might come back to the business of the missing funds. I also have great sympathy with the suggestion that more money should go directly to cancer networks; that is a very attractive proposal, and it is in keeping with the policy to cut out far more of the middle ranges of management, which we are researching and following. We want to see much more money going directly from the Secretary of State to local providers such as cancer networks.

No debate on cancer—or on almost any aspect of health care—would be complete without the contribution on complementary medicines of my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick). It is sad that Mr. Deputy Speaker did not permit him to bring out his little devices to give us an audio-visual display, but he can show them after the debate to anyone who is interested in them. My hon. Friend likened the Whips' Office to a herb patch or herb garden; I have never thought of it in that way. It has always been the duty of the Whips to keep rebels at bay, and it is always sensible for one to heed the sage advice of one's Whips, but he has put that in a new perspective. He also raised some serious points about the need to regulate complementary medicines; where they are scientifically proven, they have a great role to play—not least in the areas highlighted in Macmillan Cancer Relief's new book.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner)—who is no longer present—spoke about the cancer network that covers the area that he represents: it also covers my constituency, which is next door to Brighton. He is right that we need to centralise some of the cancer infrastructure and machinery—in this case, it is being centred in Brighton. He also mentioned what he referred to as a parochial campaign by people in my area who did not want their cancer centre to be removed from Haywards Heath to Brighton. However, that had great implications for the longer-term rundown of the Princess Royal hospital at Haywards Heath. There were also many implications for the transport infrastructure in our part of the world; it is difficult for people to travel across what is a rural county into the city of Brighton and Hove. However, I largely agree with his conclusions.

We have heard much about the structure of the cancer networks. There are 34 of them, and they are organised into 11 regions. Within each network, every primary care organisation—the primary care trust, for instance—will have a lead clinician whose job will be to provide strategic leadership in the development of services for cancer patients within the PCT, and to contribute to the development of the network. They will also be responsible for ensuring that services are responsive to patients' needs, which is very important. They will have joint funding from the Department of Health and Macmillan Cancer Relief: that will mean that each PCT will have about £5,000 to fund the lead clinician post. However, Glen Purland, the head of policy development at Macmillan Cancer Relief, said:

"The scope of their job is huge and these people are only funded for two sessions per week at most."

The Runcorn GP Cliff Richards—not to be confused with Cliff Richard—is very involved with his cancer network. He commented:

"While we have a national shortage of GPs, it's difficult to see how they can find the time to sit down in their multidisciplinary meetings. This is something the network can lobby for but it's not something we can demand. We may not need huge new resources but we will need the time because we're talking about changing clinical behaviour and the way we work as teams. Without protected time for education and multidisciplinary training, it will be very difficult."

He makes important points that must be taken on board. However good cancer networks are in principle, only when they are put into practice will we be able to establish whether they will be successful in the delivery of services, which is all-important.

We hear much about performance targets, not least in the area of cancer treatment. Performance targets—including maximum one-month waits, targets on the

time from urgent GP referral to treatment for children's and testicular cancers and acute leukaemia, targets from diagnosis to treatment for breast cancer, which were supposedly introduced last year, and targets from diagnosis to treatment for all cancers—will be in force by 2005. By this year, there should be a maximum two-month wait from urgent GP referral to treatment for breast cancers, and the Prime Minister, in his speech at the Labour party conference, said that he could tick that box. By 2005 there should be a maximum two-month wait from urgent GP referral to treatment for all cancers.

Reeling off a list of plans, targets and schemes that have been published and "met" should not be the benchmark of the Government's success in tackling the causes and treatment of cancer. What should be measured is the output and outcome, not the amount of paperwork, which the Government are so good at producing. Professor Gordon McVie, the director general of the Cancer Research campaign, said that the targets are reasonable given the state of the NHS, but very soft compared with Holland or France, for example. In France, one can expect a consultant appointment in a couple of days, not a couple of weeks. Let us not delude ourselves about the distance that we still have to travel to catch up in that regard.

Cancer patients and the cancer networks themselves are in no way immune to the problems throughout the NHS. Cancer specialists have asked for 600 oncologists—specialist cancer doctors—during the next three years, but they have been promised 1,000 in six years. The Government need to be going further abroad rather more aggressively to recruit those extra doctors. I shall return to that question at the end of my speech.

There is little point in reducing the waiting time to see a consultant if there is a delay in access to diagnostic equipment or the treatment is simply not available within the NHS. Specialists must now concentrate their valuable time and resources on consultations for diagnosis, which leaves them little time for treatment thereafter.

The great problem, especially in my area, is the shortage of radiographers and radiologists, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown would agree if he was still here. The Department of Health figures from a few months ago show that 130 consultant radiology posts have been vacant for more than three months. There is a severe shortage of consultants in that speciality, with the breast screening service alone believed to be short of no fewer than 200 consultants. In the hospital in my constituency, only recently were we able to fill a consultant radiologist vacancy after three years. The vacancy rate is stark for radiographers in our part of the world: there is a 5.1 per cent. vacancy rate for diagnostic radiographers in the south-east and a 13.1 per cent. vacancy rate for therapeutic radiographers. That means that we are missing about 30 therapeutic radiographers.

As we heard earlier, there is a problem with cancer funding being siphoned off. The Committee chaired by the hon. Member for Norwich, North did the House a great service in producing a hard-hitting report that brought the issue to everyone's attention. Money promised to improve cancer care appears to have been siphoned off by the NHS to pay for other priorities, not least to cover shortfalls on accumulated debts or carried-over debts. In the Government's cancer plan, published in September 2000, the Government promised to increase spending on cancer care by £570 million a year by 2003–04, but the hon. Gentleman's Committee identified £280 million or so in the first round of funding that had been diverted by NHS trusts to pay off debt or to meet administration costs or other targets. The Department of Health itself admitted that it was not entirely sure where the money had gone.

That is evidence of a lack of funding reaching the front line. Professor Jonathan Waxman, professor of oncology at London's Imperial college, said that the money was

"not coming to the coal face. The Plan says the right things, but the money has to come in and, at the moment, there is no funding to put doctors and nurses in posts. As a result, waiting times have gone up because we have more to do, but there are very few of us to do it."

Locally, Stuart Welling, the chief executive of Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS trust, which got very little from the cancer care plan, said:

"Out of £407 million, I would have expected to have seen rather more."

Jo Yardley, the general manager of the Kent oncology centre in Maidstone, said that the centre had asked for in excess of £1 million for this financial year. She said:

"It was reduced to £650,000 and has now been reduced again . . . The waits cause immense anxiety yet I have never reported on any"

national

"performance programme. It's something that we have been crying out for for years."

Hilary Thomas, a professor of oncology at the Royal Surrey County hospital, said:

"When the money comes in, the chief executives want to put the money into achieving the targets over which they will get sacked."

As *The Sunday Times* said,

"The public should know that one patient might be getting their varicose veins surgery done to meet some silly target in a manifesto and another",

who does not appear on the waiting list,

"might not get radical treatment for cancer that may make a difference to whether they live to old age or not."

There are many examples from around the country of senior oncologists within cancer networks feeling that they do not see the money at the sharp end where it is really needed. Progress has been made, but the system still militates against much more progress being made in future.

Has the Department of Health yet worked out where the missing money went, and is it prepared to account for it? What progress has the Department made in recruiting new oncologists, and at what level? What success is it having in recruiting from abroad? Press reports say that there has been an increase of only 45 medical staff—doctors—recruited from the continent, and already we are hearing stories about German and French teams leaving after only a few weeks or months in the country.

What progress has been made in recruiting radiologists and radiographers, particularly in the south-east, where shortages are greatest? What progress has the modernisation agency made in extending the cancer services collaborative programme to all cancer networks by 2003, and what practical effect will that

[Tim Loughton]

have on delivery of cancer services? Will the Minister also give an update on the progress made in integrating prevention work into the cancer networks, not least in relation to alcohol—we still eagerly await the Government's alcohol strategy—diet and obesity links to cancer?

What progress has there been on the development of software for a cancer database at primary care level, and which Minister is leading on information technology in the national health service now? What assessment have the Government made of the great diversity in service delivery between the networks, and how will they communicate that information to the House? Those are interesting questions, which will give pointers to how far and how fast the Government are progressing the cancer networks.

The subject is important. Cancer networks are important developments, but the networks are not the be-all and end-all of progress in eliminating cancer in this country. Surely it is what the networks deliver that is all-important to our constituents, and surely it is delivery progress that we need to know more about, rather than progress in setting up yet more structures.

10.42 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on yet again raising the issue of cancer services. He does us all a service by speaking in Westminster Hall and the Chamber on a regular basis and reminding us that we have made progress on cancer but still have a lot more to do. I am genuinely grateful for the constructive pressure that he puts on me in relation to both funding and service delivery.

I welcome the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) to the Liberal Democrats' Front Bench. I shall come to her comments later, but the picture of misery that she painted is not one that I particularly recognise in cancer networks. I hope that, as time goes on, she will become a little more optimistic about the progress that the Government are making. People from various networks across the country who are daily involved in trying to improve cancer care are present today and I am sure that they too welcome the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North is chairing the all-party group on cancer's fourth "Britain against cancer" conference. I understand that yesterday, on its first day, the conference was extremely well attended. A number of high-profile speakers, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, made a contribution. Professor Peter Boyle, from the European Institute of Oncology, presented data showing that, among EU member states, the United Kingdom was one of the top performers in reducing cancer mortality since 1960. That confirms the findings of Professors Sir Richard Doll and Sir Richard Peto, who last summer reported that, since the 1970s, Britain's men have had the world's sharpest fall in premature death from lung cancer, and, in the past decade, British women have had the world's biggest decrease in deaths from breast cancer. There is more work to be done, but we must acknowledge that Britain is certainly moving in the right direction in beginning to tackle cancer, one of the biggest killers.

Mrs. Calton: There have undoubtedly been improvements, particularly in the prevention of men's cancers. There is, however, a long way to go with regard to women's cancers, particularly that associated with smoking. In fact, the position of women is very different from that of men. Will the Minister comment on the steps that the Government are taking to ensure that women here see the same reductions as have occurred in other parts of Europe?

Ms Blears: I was about to say that the data confirm that we are right to invest in preventive services. Several hon. Members raised the importance of prevention, in addition to treatment and research into a cure. The hon. Lady must acknowledge that this country now has some of the world's leading smoking cessation services. Both Zyban and nicotine replacement therapy are available on prescription and 40 per cent. of such prescriptions are free, so we are clearly getting through to people in poorer communities who smoke more than those in better-off communities. We should also consider the issue of women's smoking and alcohol consumption. The shift to preventive measures is, therefore, a top priority for the Government.

But we are not complacent. I simply want to set the scene and say that we are going in the right direction. I recognise, however, that we have a lot more to do. The Secretary of State reiterated yesterday at the conference that cancer is a top priority for the Government. That has been made evident by the cancer plan and the significant extra investment in cancer resources. I shall come later to the issue of the audit trail and the need to ensure that that money is spent on cancer care.

Just over two years ago we published the NHS cancer plan. That was the first time that any Government had drawn up a major programme of action to link prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and research to follow the patient pathway through all stages of treatment. It is not an exaggeration to say that that was an almost revolutionary approach to patient care and that it has informed not only cancer care, but a range of other disease pathways. We are undergoing a complete reconfiguration of the organisation of our health services. Patients are being put at the centre of the services and provided with those that they need, rather than having to fit in, regardless of whether the services meet their needs or those of their communities. The cancer plan was a turning point in our reconfiguration of the NHS.

I want to acknowledge the work and commitment of the thousands of staff who are working together across organisations to try to modernise cancer services. It is important for people to be able to take time out from their day-to-day practice to think through new ways of working to try to shorten waiting times and to bring in new and innovative approaches, but that is not always easy when people are working outside their organisations, collaborating with colleagues, working in virtual organisations and attending meetings, and I am conscious of the hard work that is taking place across the service.

I would also like to thank the 65,000 cancer patients who responded to the first ever cancer survey. Some might say that people do not want to respond to surveys, but we had an incredible response. It is a courageous Government who decide to ask patients what they think about the service, where it is good and bad, where it is working and not working, and to use, for the first time, the results of such surveys to feed into the performance management framework for the service. At long last, we are beginning to measure the success of the NHS by what the patients themselves tell us is going on in their area.

We do not pretend that there are no problems. Of course, there are problems. We do not pretend that the service is not working under incredible pressure, because it is, in every part. We must, however, be clear that patients are benefiting from improvements and cancer is one of our success stories. We are extending the breast screening service to over-65s and piloting new screening technologies. More than 95 per cent. of people with suspected cancer are seen by a specialist within two weeks, more than 31,000 extra people are benefiting from cancer drugs that have been appraised by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, and more than 500 of the most modern pieces of equipment with which to diagnose and treat cancer have been delivered to hospitals since April 2000. By 2004, a further 385 pieces of equipment will be delivered and used in the NHS. Those are tremendous improvements, but there is a long way to go. We have said that the cancer plan will take five to 10 years to implement and, even though we are in only the first two years, we are beginning to see significant progress.

The current increase in funding for cancer services—an extra £280 million in 2001–02, £407 million in 2002-03, and £570 million by 2003–04—is the largest ever. Concerns have been expressed about how much of that money is getting through to the front line. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North conducted a searching inquiry in the Select Committee, in which I was delighted to take part. It raised interesting questions and, as a result, the national clinical director for cancer, Mike Richards, is now working with the strategic health authorities to bear down on the audit trail to determine where funds have gone. We are also working with voluntary organisations in the hospice movement to see what has happened to the money for palliative care—where investment has been made and whether there are any gaps.

We recently announced that an extra £10 million would come from central funds this year to ensure that there is a swift injection into vital services relating to palliative care and I am determined that the extra investment from the Government will make a difference to cancer patients. I can tell the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) that our targets for treatment times are of key importance because early diagnosis and treatment mean better outcomes and survival rates for patients. Investment has been made in cancer services even in the most pressured authorities, and we are on track to meet important targets to improve services for patients.

Tim Loughton: I take the Minister's point, but will she admit that setting strict targets—especially for initial referral—ties up consultant time, which adds to the time delays for people needing treatment. In some cases, it distorts the system because of staff shortages.

Ms Blears: It is important at every stage of the patient pathway to try to ensure that the waiting time is as short as possible. Prioritising one part at the expense of another is not the way to design a proper holistic system that meets the needs of patients. We need to bear down on waiting times in diagnosis, screening, treatment—at all stages in the patient pathway. That is why the Government have developed a coherent programme, rather than caved in to pressures of the moment.

My hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North and for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) have pressed for the introduction of a cancer Bill for some time, and the hon. Member for Cheadle was not sure of the Liberal Democrat position, but the right way forward is through the cancer plan. Cancer treatment is a top priority for the Government, but it is one of a number of clinical priorities. I do not want our system to be fragmented and drawn to specific disease groups. Through the cancer plan, we can allocate funding, gather the work force, shorten waiting times and improve treatment for patients without fragmenting the infrastructure that is crucial to supporting action throughout the NHS, not only in the important area of cancer treatment.

Dr. Gibson: Why then, is there a draft Mental Health Bill?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend knows very well that the Mental Health Bill will deal not only with treatment, but with several important areas relating to the assessment and identification of individuals needing care and support within the care system. I am sure that he recognises that the area of mental health is significantly different from that of diseases such as cancer. Ring-fencing funds for specific disease groups would cause significant problems for the NHS. As he knows, issues surrounding diagnosis, research, equipment and staff are not always identified only for cancer treatment, but for a range of different diseases—we have had some interesting discussions about the way in which research into disease groups applies not only to cancer. Therefore, it is important to integrate cancer treatment and keep it connected to the rest of the NHS. I have no doubt that we shall continue to debate the cancer plan but, at the moment, we are trying to shift the centre of gravity in the NHS to ensure that money goes to the front line and that, as far as possible, all services are kept together and integrated.

Several hon. Members spoke about patient involvement, and I hope that they know of my absolute commitment to public and patient involvement. Changing the NHS to take account of patients' priorities will allow us to improve services dramatically. I was pleased to appoint Harry Caton as the director of public involvement in patient experience. In highlighting such issues, he is making a tremendous contribution to the NHS. I understand that all the networks now have patient involvement, although some are more developed than others. We want to bring everyone up to the level of the best.

[Ms Blears]

In December, I shall speak at a conference that has been organised by Macmillan Cancer Relief. The conference will focus on ways in which we can bring together carers, patients and professionals to ensure that we learn from the experience of patients. Some of the best suggestions for change come from people who are going through the service, and we have a great deal to learn from them. I love the phrase "Trust me, I'm a patient." We could all happily support that.

The hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) spoke about complementary therapists. He will know that we are preparing NICE guidance on supportive and palliative care. Draft guidance, which will include guidance on complementary therapies, will go out to consultation next summer. Such therapies are becoming more mainstream in the NHS; I know that the hon. Gentleman has been pressing for that for a long time. Such mainstreaming occurs especially in cancer care and palliative care—pain relief. The role that acupuncture can play is fairly well established. We have funded research projects to try to obtain more evidence. Many cancer networks already involve complementary therapists in a range of services. The hon. Gentleman is therefore pushing at an open door, but we must be sure that the therapies work and are based on good evidence, and that investment in them is worth while.

Several Hon. Members spoke about diet and exercise, which are key issues for the Government. They will know about the national school fruit scheme, which will give a free piece of fruit to primary school children every day in an effort to encourage healthy eating habits early in life, and that scheme is expanding throughout the country. I think that 300,000 children are now receiving their free piece of fruit; by 2004, every primary school child will be receiving it.

We are about to launch some exercise pilot schemes to find innovative ways of involving people in exercise—in particular, we will work with people from poorer communities who traditionally have not been able to go to expensive leisure centres. I look forward to the results of those schemes. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has a huge programme of investment in school sports co-ordinators to try to involve young people and children in good exercise early in life.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North suggested that we might have tsars in every clinical network to ensure progress in cancer care. As he knows, we have clinical leads in every network who have taken on that role and who have done an extremely good job. My hon. Friend said that, in America, they were known as quarter-backs; in my part of the country, they would probably be scrum halves, so some of my clinical leads may see themselves in that role. It is important that clinical ownership is embedded in our networks. We are talking about the people on the front line and they know what needs to be done. Giving them power and influence in the service is key.

The hon. Member for Cheadle read out some fairly depressing statistics on waiting times; however, from April to June of this year, almost 95 per cent. of women with breast cancer received their first treatment within a month of diagnosis. That is not a bad achievement. I therefore urge the hon. Lady to consider the glass half full rather than half empty. In the same period, 93 per cent. of patients with testicular cancer, 100 per cent. of children with cancer and 99 per cent. of patients with acute leukaemia received their treatment within one month. We are making significant progress in tackling cancer and patients are delighted that such improvements are beginning.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham mentioned radiology. We are increasing the number of training places, we have more consultants and we are going out to recruit. I remind him that under the Conservative Government, training places in every profession were cut. We cannot create radiologists and radiographers overnight. We are creating extra training places that will come through to the service in due course. At least this Government have a commitment to extra investment—

Mr. James Cran (in the Chair): Order. Time is up.

Nurses' Pay

11 am

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the important issue of nurses' pay. Although I have wanted such a debate for a long time, owing to the happy way in which parliamentary affairs are conducted, I have secured the debate in the week when the Royal College of Nursing published the results of its 2002 membership survey.

My starting point is in my constituency, as hon. Members customarily expect. Addenbrooke's hospital is in my constituency, and last Friday I had the privilege of attending the annual lecture there at which David Lomas, a consultant physician, was explaining the ground-breaking work being done there on emphysema and genetic predisposition. During the lecture, he illustrated how nurse practitioners work with emphysema patients to facilitate a quick return home and reduce demands on the hospital while providing a service that patients find more acceptable and that enables them to live at home independently.

Addenbrooke's is right at the front rank of this country's hospitals. Ground-breaking research that is of the highest quality in the world—the hospital leads an international network of researchers on the subject—is combined with the finest nursing practice. However, the hospital faces severe difficulties. The turnover of trained nurses and midwives is 12 per cent. and the vacancy level for nursing staff is 9.5 per cent. Many vacancies exist for surgery and gynaecology nurses. There is a 22 per cent. vacancy level for midwives, which shows the difficulty of replacing staff who leave.

The consequences of a lack of suitable nursing staff are only too clear. Beds are being closed, and a Select Committee heard a couple of weeks ago that the rate was the equivalent of closing a 30-bed ward in Addenbrooke's every day. Bed use rates in the hospital are driven even higher: they are currently about 98 per cent. The Minister and hon. Members will know that the Department of Health wants rates that are nearer 82 per cent. The Audit Commission report published the other day made recommendations about the rates of bed occupancy in hospitals that would allow accident and emergency facilities to work most effectively and allow onward referrals from them without long waits. High bed occupancy rates cause not only long waits but the cancellation of elective surgery. That is a serious problem at Addenbrooke's from time to time and it is an issue in summer as well as winter.

That all causes nurses' work load to increase. High occupancy levels cause an additional work load, and I suspect that we all know that nurses' work loads are much higher now. In the past, convalescent patients would have been present on wards and patients would spend more time in hospital before being discharged. There is now every pressure to work intensively to discharge patients and release beds as quickly as possible. The vacancy levels that I have discussed are compared with the funded establishment level. They are not necessarily sufficient for today, given the intensity with which beds are being used and the extended role of nurses.

Addenbrooke's is in a high-cost area, one of the highest outside central London. It is an exciting hospital to work in. It aspires to, and reaches, the highest standards of clinical care, and has some of the best family-friendly policies in the country. However, the nursing staff are increasingly hard pressed and increasingly hard to recruit and retain.

How can we break that cycle of problems and deliver NHS growth? An issue that is currently being considered at the local level is key worker housing. I acknowledge the benefit that that can provide—we have seen the benefit of housing association provision alongside the Addenbrooke's site—but the numbers are limited. I do not want us to return to the situation in which most NHS staff must live in what is in effect tied housing, because we pay them substantially below the market rates for people working in that location.

The purpose of the debate, from my point of view, is to decide the question of nurses' pay and the contribution that it could and should make to the resolution of these problems. The last debate on nurses' pay in the House was held in January 1999. Much has changed, and it is highly desirable that the Minister and hon. Members have an opportunity to debate the issue. I support the concept of an independent pay review for nurses, so why debate it here? We should debate it for several reasons.

First, the Government's evidence to the pay review body, and the view that they and their Departments take on recruitment, retention and affordability, is a substantial aspect of the process of pay review. Secondly, the agenda for change negotiations, which should now be reaching a conclusion, should represent a substantial long-term development in extending the role of nursing staff in the provision of care, and should be accompanied by a restructuring of pay to reflect the additional responsibilities. That is, of course, a direct Government negotiation. It is not being negotiated through the independent pay review body but will be referred to it after the conclusion of the overall negotiations. I hope that the Minister will tell us something about that.

Thirdly, a great deal of taxpayers' money—one sixth of Addenbrooke's budget—is spent on nurses' salaries. The Government are accountable for their advice on that aspect to the pay review body, and for the value that they attach to the contribution of nurses to the NHS as reflected in pay. It is equally incumbent on us in Parliament to have the opportunity to reflect on that value and on how the Government represent the public sector's and the taxpayers' view.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate, which I agree is extremely important for Cambridge and especially Addenbrooke's hospital, but does he agree that the long-term solution to the very high costs in and around Cambridge is to release more land for building? Will he consider the fact that his objections to the county council's structure plan, if I understood them correctly, would be likely to result in the release of less land for building, so continuing the upward spiral of house prices and making the situation much worse?

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her remarks about the desirability of the debate. She was present at a previous debate in the Chamber on the Cambridge green belt, and will know that on, I believe,

[Mr. Lansley]

13 November, at the examination in public on the Cambridge structure plan, I will make my argument about the desirability of limiting building on the green belt around Cambridge because of its incompatibility with the purposes of the green belt. That does not mean that there should be a limitation on the number of houses to be built. There is no argument at the examination in public about the fact that the Cambridge sub-region should build at the rate of 200,800 additional homes a year, only about where those houses should go. I am afraid that her point is irrelevant to the debate, because the houses could as readily be at Waterbeach, for example, with a shuttle-train access from there to the Addenbrooke's site that would take 13 minutes, as in Cherry Hinton or the airfield site, where people would have to use buses, which would take 25 minutes. We may argue about where the housing should be, but I will not take a lecture on the Cambridge green belt.

Nurse recruitment from overseas is a valuable, and possibly essential, part of our response to nurse recruitment difficulties in the short term, but it is a risky long-term strategy. To increase recruitment to nursing to the required extent in a tight labour market will require an increase, not a decline, in pay for nurses relative to the labour market as a whole.

Changes in responsibility and extending the role of nurses are desirable, and will necessitate changes in pay structures and levels, but such changes are complementary to the issue of nurses' general pay level, not a substitute for tackling it. In our previous employment, if we were told that there was to be a restructuring that would lead to new responsibilities, we would all probably have expected additional pay. However, for those who do not expect that, that is no reason for them not to receive pay that reflects the genuine labour market in their professional area.

Comparability is not the primary basis on which to assess pay—although it should not be ignored—since pay is rarely the reason why nurses find their job rewarding, but poor pay in nursing, as in any other walk of life, is a substantial demotivating factor, and will cause lack of retention. A significant part of nurses' perception of whether their pay is good or poor is the comparisons that they make with the rest of the public sector.

The serious recruitment and retention problems in some NHS trusts often reflect the relationship between high labour cost areas and the adherence to national pay scales. If trusts are to be free to pay in excess of national pay scales, as they are in theory, or if foundation hospitals enjoy such a freedom in due course, those foundation hospitals must be assured that they will have the resources to back that up. That is a matter for the contracting bodies—the primary care trusts—whose resources reflect the relative costs of providing a service in that area. Addenbrooke's is, of course, one of the hospitals that is most likely to apply for and receive foundation status, having achieved a three-star rating on two successive occasions.

The determination of nurses' pay must be a matter for independent review and recommendation. No reasonable level of pay increase is likely to be recommended that could not be funded from the prospective 10 per cent. per annum increases in NHS funding overall. The consequences of failing to act now on pay may be to place in jeopardy the achievement of reform and service enhancement in the future. If we do not demonstrate that we value the work that nurses do, the loss of trained nursing staff will accelerate, and no amount of target setting by Ministers will stop the beds and theatres lying idle while patients wait.

The evidence this year to the pay review body from the staff side sets out many of those factors. In the past five years, the number of registered nurses in England has increased by 20,000 on a whole-time equivalent basis. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the number decreased between 1996 and 2000. However, given that over the same period there have been 35,000 overseas registrations, and even allowing for the limited length of time of some of those registrations, it is reasonable to say that the increase that has occurred in the nursing work force has been through overseas recruitment. That can also be seen at Addenbrooke's, where some very successful recruitment operations have been undertaken, and Filipino nurses, for example, do an excellent job. However, we must work harder to continue to recruit from the pool of talent overseas. We constantly have to replenish our resources from it, and the evidence suggested by the staff side to the pay review body is that international competition for good nurses is increasing.

The work force—the national work force as a whole—is expected to grow over the next 20 years, but at a rate estimated at only 0.5 per cent. per annum. Matching the Government's objectives for the nursing work force, however, would require 1.5 per cent. growth per annum. We thus need not only to sustain the nursing work force in a tight labour market but to increase the share of the work force taken by the nursing profession.

Serious divergences remain between the statistically based view of Departments and the evidence of individual trusts and managers that recruitment and retention problems have worsened and are serious enough to justify action by the pay review body. NHS proposals for the consultants' contract and for GPs have offered substantial—about 20 per cent.—increases in remuneration in return for reform. At the same time, the role for non-medical staff is growing, through more nurse prescribing or, as at Addenbrooke's, through innovative proposals for emergency nurse practitioners in casualty departments.

If nurses embrace reform and responsibility, they should expect significant benefits, but not every nurse will be able to do so and we risk demotivating nurses who continue in their existing role if we do not change basic pay levels as well as providing enhancements for extended roles.

On comparability, according to staff side evidence, nurses' earnings have declined from 89.1 per cent. of non-manual average earnings in 1995 to 87.8 per cent. in 2001. After three years in post, a nurse at the top of grade D will earn £17,760 in comparison with £22,992 for a police constable. I may be reaching back into the dim and distant past, but I recall that nurses and police officers were previously viewed as highly comparable. They used to spend some time together, sitting around waiting for patients, victims or offenders to be discharged from hospital. I know about that because my brother married a nurse who was trained at Addenbrooke's hospital. We have come full circle and

pay has now diverged. Expenditure on agency staff in the NHS was £570 million last year, nearly four times the amount spent in 1997.

Those examples are taken from the staff side evidence previously submitted. The Royal College of Nursing membership survey was published earlier this week and offers additional significant evidence. Nearly two thirds of NHS nurses felt that their nursing establishment was insufficient to meet patient needs. One third working in hospitals reported that the problem was serious enough to compromise patient care. More and more nurses work in excess of contracted hours, averaging an extra seven hours per week, a quarter of which are unpaid. About 29 per cent. of nurses—the number is increasing—now take additional jobs. Only a quarter of NHS nurses believe that they are well paid for the work that they do. Nine out of 10 regard themselves as not well paid in comparison with other professional groups.

Reductions in grade levels, inappropriate grading and the lack of pay recognition for additional responsibilities are further problems reported in the RCN survey. Such problems undermine the confidence of the nursing profession in the prospect of a pay for responsibilities approach as articulated recently by the Secretary of State in response to the RCN survey. Whereas 72 per cent. of nurses regarded nursing as a rewarding career in the 2001 survey, only 56 per cent. said the same this year.

As the RCN makes clear, the survey results continually come back to two issues: work load and the value that nurses feel that we, by which I mean the public, place on their work. If we do not act, we will end up with a demotivated profession with more and more nurses retiring in future years. A demotivated profession would mean a substantial number of nurses leaving, through both retirement and the attraction of other jobs in a tight labour market. A third of NHS nurses would leave nursing if they could. If that happens, work load pressures will worsen, and the desire to leave will grow, leading to a vicious spiral. Overseas nurse recruitment will not necessarily be sustained, leaving capacity in the NHS unable to grow.

Independent sector health capacity is equally dependent on the supply of trained nurses. The work load pressures in that sector are less great, but I submit that we could not comfortably look to the independent sector to be able to recruit and retain anything like the substantial number of nurses who might leave the NHS.

Agency nursing can help. Agency and bank nursing systems provide a way of filling short-term vacancies, and valuable flexibility in acute care, but they do so at a price. With the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) present, I confess that I recently saw posts for agency nurses in his constituency advertised at £22.85 per hour. By my reckoning, that is about twice the level of pay per hour that would be available to a nurse on a full-time contract in the same hospital. Demotivation certainly results from such comparisons.

We must consider substantial change to secure an enhanced role for nurses and enhanced pay. In addition, in April 2003, before the agenda for change negotiations can have a substantial effect, we need a general recognition of the need to respond to recruitment and retention pressures for the profession as a whole, to demonstrate the value that we place on nurses, who are instrumental to quality care for patients. Expanding the nursing work force would enable progress to be made towards managing better the work load pressures on the service as it attempts to meet the growing demands for ever more intensive and sophisticated health care.

A few months ago, I participated in a conference led by Papworth hospital, which is in my constituency, on extending the role of non-medical staff as a result of the extensive and important role that nurses will increasingly be taking up in delivering care. In some cases, one might almost characterise the consultant physician as overseeing the role not of other doctors but of nurses providing care. Nurses will work substantially within the protocols and parameters set by medical staff, but with a great deal of independence.

Within the leading NHS trusts, those freedoms must be real if we are to provide the quality and volume of care that is increasingly demanded of us. Those hospitals must be resourced to reflect their activity levels and their costs. They must be able to use that freedom to meet the extra pay or accommodation costs involved in recruitment and retention in a high-cost area.

The Government's evidence to the pay review body must not discount the concerns of nurses, talk up the prospects for more recruitment or retention when the front line appears to know better, or trade off service improvements against nurses' pay. That could prejudice the trained staff whose contribution to the NHS is essential. If service improvements and growth in capacity are to be realised, we cannot put nurses in the invidious position of believing that fair pay for nurses is somehow inconsistent with service improvements for patients.

I should like to know that the Minister understands and accepts those propositions. When—the "when" is quite important to Addenbrooke's—and how will foundation trust status be better defined? I would like Addenbrooke's hospital, which for this purpose is my principal concern, and other hospitals throughout the country to have the freedom to reflect not only fair pay in the labour market in their area but any need that they may have in respect of extending nurse responsibilities. Generally, I want hospitals to be resourced to meet those responsibilities and the costs of recruitment and retention in their area.

When I next meet nursing staff representatives at Addenbrooke's hospital, I want to be able to say that when politicians say that we value the work that they do we will actually have done something about it. That is the purpose of this debate.

11.24 am

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I should declare an interest, as I am approaching the age when one might need to rely on one's family: one of my daughters is an NHS nurse.

I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on the impeccable timing of this debate, which is absolutely staggering. I want to paint a brief picture of the work of an NHS nurse, thinking of a ward sister. She gets into work and finds the chaos of the night. The ward is understaffed, especially in respect of trained staff. She has the stress of achieving acceptable levels of care and of supporting

[Dr. Richard Taylor]

other stressed staff. She has to support the nurses who are doing the jobs of junior doctors under the absolutely appropriate extension of nursing duties. She also has to cope with directives from nurse managers who in some cases appear to be more interested in targets than in staff morale. She gets home late.

In my constituency, because of the tremendous overspending, especially on agency nursing, budget holders have had a two-page letter about improving financial control, particularly with regard to agency nursing. First, there is a set of guidelines; secondly, there are four more detailed steps that the nurse, sister or charge nurse in my example has to go through before being able to consider the use of agency nurses. Compare that with the usually protected existence in the private sector where there is adequate staffing, little if any stress from an unexpected emergency load and working hours that staff can keep to. Compare it, too, with the life of agency nurses who can choose exactly when they want to work. They go in and do their nursing duties and they do not have the responsibility of running a ward. Some agency nurses who are very well motivated may help, but it is not part of their job. They have nursing duties only.

I am extremely concerned about the expenditure on agency nurses to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The Department of Health is not yet able to tell us exactly how much was spent on agency nurses last year, but the estimate of the general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing is about £800 million. In Worcestershire, the acute trust spent £3.3 million on agency nurses in 2000–01 and £4.3 million in 2001–02. In the first five months of this year, the figure is already £4.3 million.

There is a better answer than the use of agency nurses, better even than the proposed use of the Government's own agency: to pay NHS nurses realistically to take into account the stress and responsibility of the job as well as their productivity, thus reducing spending on agencies.

The Minister will recall that in a letter to me in July last year, he said:

"The key principle is something for something. Rewarding people for what they do, and the roles and responsibilities taken on."

Our NHS nurses are extremely productive. They have taken on enhanced roles and responsibilities, which must be respected and recognised.

11.29 am

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on securing the debate, particularly in the week when the Royal College of Nursing is rightly making headlines on this issue. First, I should declare an interest. To my knowledge, I am the only nurse here in the Chamber, and I also still have an association with the Community and District Nursing Association.

I feel very passionately about nursing and nursing care. It is often said that people remember nurses. Well, nurses remember Governments. Nurses have excellent memories. Without wanting to take up hon. Members' time today, I cannot resist the opportunity to point out that I took up my first post as a staff nurse on a busy medical ward on a late afternoon shift on the day when the newly elected Conservative Government took office in 1979. I spent much of my clinical nursing practice under that Government's stewardship of the NHS. I know about stress. I know about difficult working conditions. I know about trying to gain credibility and financial recognition for my profession and my skills. I had many skills, and I am pleased that there are now diplomas and degrees in nursing and that nurses' vast knowledge is recognised and accredited in an academic sense.

Nursing is a science and an art. Bringing the two together is very complex at times. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) pointed out, nurses have few convalescent patients in hospital or in the community. Nurses have high-dependency patients for whom advanced technical and pharmaceutical knowledge is required to deliver complex health care. How do we ensure that those noble and able people who are the mainstay of the NHS remain? One cannot talk about health without talking about nursing. The recognition that the current Government are giving is very welcome, but much more must take place. I would be the first to recognise and encourage that.

Along with agency nursing and pay comes the issue of flexible working. When I was a ward sister I could not offer flexible working to many of my staff and auxiliary nurses. It was a rigid system. Flexibility and child care were not on the agenda, but they are now on the agenda in many walks of life, and that is to be encouraged. The money that has been invested by the Government in child care facilities for hospital workers allows nurses to be seen as people who belong not just to the NHS but to their family. Nurses need to be able to balance work and family life if they are to stay in a profession that is demanding both mentally and physically. I had to leave clinical nursing to go into teaching because of a serious back injury that I suffered as a district nurse. We must recognise the physical commitment that nursing demands.

Flexibility, time off and rewards are important. I am so pleased that in the Budget earlier this year the Chancellor announced the new tax credits that will come into effect in April next year. For the first time, student nurses will be able to claim tax credits for children. I hope that all hon. Members present today will encourage student nurses to take up their entitlement, which can mean up to £38 a week. Student nurses were not able to claim income support before because they were not classified as workers. They have never been able to claim the working families tax credit for that reason. They fall between the two categories: they are neither proper students nor proper workers. I hope that all hon. Members, but particularly the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire, will see to it that the issue is taken up. Not only student nurses but all nurses will benefit from the new child tax credit and working tax credit, and I hope that people in all parties will take up the campaign before next April.

It is important that we get modernisation and the agenda for change right. In the past, the pay review bodies have recommended increases for nurses, and I am pleased that they have been paid in full in many instances. That did not always happen under previous Governments, and once, when we did get a pay increase,

we were asked to donate it to the hospital to fund its desperate bid to buy new equipment. One might expect that to have happened a century ago, but it also happened in the 1990s.

It is encouraging to hear hon. Members talk about the value of nursing. If we are really to value it, however, we must ensure that hospitals implement a family-friendly policy. They must encourage the take-up of the current credits, to which some working people are entitled, and of those to which many more people will be entitled from next April.

We must ensure that we have a team of equals. The medical profession has its problems at the moment, as do consultants, but I ask them to reflect on the way in which members of the nursing profession support the team, and in many instances use their knowledge to lead it. As a former nurse, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to address Parliament on behalf of nurses.

11.36 am

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): This is an important debate, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute, although I do so only because I am sorry that there are so few people in the Chamber.

Nurses' pay is a huge issue in Cambridge because of the high cost of living, which affects not only nurses but many other low-paid workers. Indeed, I am sure that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) has come across further education lecturers, university lecturers and others who have had incredible difficulty finding somewhere affordable to live, although one would not imagine that they would.

About a year ago, a staff nurse at Addenbrooke's came to see me. She was not a low-paid worker, but was earning just over £20,000 a year. The problem, however, is that the local authority is unlikely to consider people who earn that amount for social housing, so she was unable to get a council house or to get on a housing association list and she had to rely on the private rented sector in Cambridge, which is very expensive.

That woman had a son of 11 or 12, whose schooling had been disrupted by her housing difficulties. Throughout his primary school career, she had to move from one private rented sector property to another, which inevitably meant that he had to change primary schools several times. The difficulties are not purely financial, and people's lives are disrupted and are sometimes of a low quality. I have not heard from that woman for a good 12 months, and I hope that she is still at Addenbrooke's, but I fear that many people in that situation give up and decide to work somewhere where accommodation is cheaper.

To return to planning issues, Cambridge will not survive in the long term unless it can accommodate low-paid and even medium-paid workers. As the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire said, house prices have spiralled upwards. Over the past year, they have risen by more than 20 per cent., and people are finding it increasingly difficult to find affordable accommodation. However, I disagree with him about the use of the green belt. The green belt around Cambridge is tightly drawn, which leaves only a small amount of building land in the city centre. That inevitably means that people have either to pay high prices for accommodation in the centre of Cambridge or live outside the green belt and travel into the city every day. He said that Waterbeach was a convenient settlement, and I believe that the county council should consider it again, as the rail link to Cambridge makes it an attractive option, not least because the journey takes only 13 minutes. He was quite right to say that an extension of the rail link to Addenbrooke's would make a big difference.

Mr. Lansley: Many of the nurses who have left Addenbrooke's are continuing their nursing work at Papworth hospital, because they can live in cheaper accommodation in Huntingdon or beyond Papworth. We have to solve that problem before we can contemplate moving Papworth hospital to the Addenbrooke's site. That move has many clinical reasons to commend it, but at the moment it would cause all sorts of difficulties with recruiting and retaining the nursing staff.

Mrs. Campbell: There is a great deal of agreement between us on that. However, although the hon. Gentleman is opposing the extension of housing into the green belt, Clay farm in Trumpington would provide an attractive location for staff working at Addenbrooke's. It would provide housing sufficiently near the hospital for people to be able to walk or cycle to work. That seems an extremely attractive option.

It is fair to say that the Government have taken many actions over the past few years to try to ease the situation for nurses and low-paid workers. One of the issues that concerns me is the cost of living supplement paid to nurses in the Cambridge area, which gives them an extra £600 a year. It does not go a long way towards meeting their accommodation costs, but it is better than nothing. However, it applies to nurses and therapists but not to cleaners, porters or catering, engineering or laboratory staff. That is of great concern to those other lower-paid workers, who are essential to the running of a large hospital.

About 18 months ago, I attended a rally at Addenbrooke's, when those staff were starting their campaign for recognition. I understand that the cost of living supplement is paid only to those grades covered by the pay review body, but we need to look even more closely at those who are paid on an even lower scale than nurses, because their work is essential. I hope that the Minister will consider carefully the Unison campaign to allow those workers the cost of living supplement. He and I have communicated about the matter before, but this may be the time to take a fresh look at the situation.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Will the hon. Lady also include auxiliary nurses in the list of nursing staff and health service workers who should be included? I have a constituent who has worked as an auxiliary nurse for more than 27 years. Her job has expanded and so have her responsibilities, but she has been excluded from the supplement, as have others at her level. I find that incomprehensible.

Mrs. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. It is easy for us to say that all low-paid workers should get extra money. I have made it clear that in the short term this is a huge issue, but I hope that in the

[Mrs. Campbell]

longer term it will be resolved by planning and not by the payment of supplements. Although they are badly needed now, they are not the answer.

I should like to mention the starter home initiative. A successful joint application by the health authority, the county council and the police authority in Cambridgeshire realised some £6 million, enabling low-interest loans to be paid to key workers who live within five miles of their workplace. That has made a huge difference to many low-paid workers who are defined as key workers. However, many are excluded in the process of defining. An unfortunate aspect of the scheme is that further education lecturers are excluded—they are low paid, so the distinction is rather absurd. It is up to local authorities to define key workers, and I am sorry that mine did not include further education lecturers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) has mentioned the forthcoming children's tax credit. Many low-paid workers in my constituency have already benefited from the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit. They have made an enormous difference: many lone parents, who would not otherwise have been able to afford to do so, have returned to the workplace. Many extra child care places have been provided in the city, but there is still a desperate shortage because there are so many parents in the workplace these days that all the provision has been soaked up. She made an important point about the forthcoming children's tax credit and the working tax credit. They will be available to student nurses and others who now find it difficult to survive.

I hope that, in her capacity as the Chancellor's Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend will convey the point that because of high accommodation costs in the city of Cambridge, people have to have very high incomes in order to have the same residual income as those who are paid much less in another part of the country. The problem is that the lower-paid in another area will be entitled to the working families tax credit, whereas many of my constituents who have very low residual incomes because of the high accommodation costs are not eligible. We must address that issue. I shall make the point in my own way to the Chancellor, but I shall be grateful for my hon. Friend's support.

The Government have taken a number of extremely helpful short-term measures. Longer-term measures that are in the pipeline will obviate the need for this kind of supplement and extra pay for specific workers because accommodation costs will stabilise. I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire on having raised the issue at this important and sensitive time.

11.49 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): It is a pleasure, as an Oxford Member, to thank a Cambridge Member, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), for giving us the opportunity to discuss the matter. I also thank him for presenting the parameters of the debate so clearly. Oxford shares many of the problems of high living costs mentioned by the hon. Gentleman and by the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell).

The Government are in trouble over their policy on the NHS work force. That is a problem for all of us and for our constituents, because of all the areas in which it is important for the Government to have a grip of policy, the emergency services in general and the NHS in particular are the most important. We must be sensitive to the difficulties that the Government are experiencing, some of which are not of their making, but it is also important to challenge them to answer all the criticisms of previous policy in this area.

The Government may say that they are not responsible for nurses' pay and that it is a matter for the pay review body. However, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire clearly explained, the matter should engage us all, because we are responsible for the appropriate spending of Government money, and the Government have clear, although indirect, abilities to influence the matter through the evidence that they give and the climate that they create. I hope that in answering the points that have been raised, the Government will not hide behind the pay review body.

The Minister may say, especially to Conservative Members, that it is no good talking about the need for better pay for nurses without being willing to vote in favour of allocating more money to it. That is a fair point and one that is often made by Ministers in response to such attacks from the Conservative party, but it does not solve the problem of what to do when it is necessary to spend more resources in this area. I supported the announcement of more resources in the last Budget and voted for the tax increase that went along with it. In fact, I stood on a platform of calling for the tax increases that would have made the money available some years ago. More funding is needed to benefit patients, nurses and the economy. The Minister must address that point, rather than simply asking us to will the means as well as the end, because I very much will the means.

In the Government's defence, the Minister can also point to the failure of the Conservative Government to invest in the nursing work force, although that is not especially constructive because it does not help us with the problems that we face today. That defence is much stronger in relation to the problem of the shortage in the medical work force, where the trail time is greater, because it takes so much longer to train medical staff. We are still suffering problems as a result of underinvestment and under-recruitment in the 1990s.

On nursing recruitment, I wish that the Government had acted sooner when they came to power in 1997. There was much talk about hitting the ground running, but there was no real change in the early years of the current Administration and no immediate expansion of training opportunities for nurses to deal with the work force shortage. We are paying the price of the failure by this Government to invest in expanding training opportunities.

I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen), for whom I have great respect, and who brings a great deal of experience to the debate, raise the question of the staging of pay awards. It is a matter of record that pay awards were staged by the Conservative Government in the 1990s. I thought that that was bad at the time, and Labour spokesmen agreed, but the Labour Government did the same thing in 1997.

The Library note on the subject is clear, stating that nurses were awarded 3.3 per cent. in 1997—the last example of Conservative staging—and that all awards were

"to be staged, with a 2 per cent. increase in April 1997 and the balance of the recommended increases in December 1997".

Traditionally, there has been a Government explanation and a highly critical response from the official Opposition, and that was the case in 1997. Lo and behold, nurses were awarded 3.8 per cent. in 1998, and all awards were

"staged with an increase of 2 per cent. in April 1998 and full implementation in December 1998".

Hypocrisy is an unpleasant word, and one that I suspect you would not want us to use, Mr. Hancock, but to criticise something and then to do it is not a practice of which people should be proud. It is best if Labour Members do not have selective amnesia about the staging of pay awards.

Nurses' pay is not the be-all and end-all of ensuring good recruitment and retention, as has been accepted by all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. We can point to the shambles that was the consultant contract for clear evidence of that. In my correspondence, there was nothing but recognition that pay was not the problem. The pay rise—12 per cent., 19 per cent., or whatever it was—was more than adequate for those people, but the Government were unable to meet their concerns on non-pay issues.

The need for a realistic settlement on pay can be broken down into various matters. Are nurses given fair treatment with their current level of pay? Gender is relevant to that. If men traditionally made up the same proportion of the nursing work force as of the police force, we would not have arrived at such a discrepancy between the pay for this professional group of workers and others that have been more male-dominated.

Have the pay awards been fair in terms of parity with other professionals?

Mr. Lansley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that part of the problem is that, for gender reasons and so on, nurses were historically often regarded as providing the second income for a household? However, in the RCN survey, two-thirds of respondents said that nurses' earnings accounted for half or more of their household income.

Dr. Harris: I agree. I know that the Minister wants time to respond, so I shall condense my comments and go through them more quickly.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): I do not think that that is necessary, Dr. Harris. You can make your own speech in your own time.

Dr. Harris: I am grateful to you for defending my honour, Mr. Hancock, but I know that others want to speak.

Does nurses' pay create distortions? Although many nurses are no doubt inappropriately under-graded, some hospitals inflate grades in order to recruit. That may solve the problem of insufficient grading for staff who deserve a certain grade, but there will be distortion. People with identical skills and responsibilities will find themselves on different grades.

There is clearly a problem with insufficient and insufficiently sensitive living allowances for nurses. I agree with what the hon. Member for Cambridge said about £600 not going very far in Cambridge: it does not go far in Oxford, either. There should be much more flexibility. If we want to keep to a national pay scale but deal with problems of regional shortages, there must be higher amounts for living allowances and much more flexibility within them so that they are sensitive to regional and sub-regional living costs.

The main issue is recruitment and retention, however, regardless of whether the Government accept my case that nurses suffer from unfairness and insufficient pay. It is a serious problem, which causes serious staff shortages and impacts on patient care, as we have heard from the survey. It also has an unfair impact on our treatment of economies in the developing world, from which we are sucking some of the best trained professionals. We are not taking advantage of nursing skills in refugee and asylum seeker populations, and we spend over the odds—from £500 million to £800 million—to buy back people who have left. That is bad enough from an economic point of view, but it also has an impact on the quality of care, and it is demotivating, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire said.

We have to recognise that nurses have skills that are transferable in the labour market and that we are simply unable to compete, on current levels, with other potential employers. If for no other reason than that, labour market forces must put pressure on the Government to give evidence to the nursing review body to encourage the body to recognise the real problems. All the advantages of the complex tax credits that the Government have introduced are available to nurses in whatever jobs they do, not only to nurses in the NHS. Some of those jobs have greater flexibility in terms of hours.

We must pay attention to the housing shortage. The Government have recently woken up to that problem, although they are five years too late. I question whether there is a joined-up system in respect of housing, because many brownfield sites lie within NHS trusts, which are not acute trusts but community trusts and want the biggest return on land sales. That return may not come from the provision of affordable housing, which other parts of the health economy would want. The NHS has a real problem in responding to housing need.

I finish with a quote from the Secretary of State, who told the Royal College of Nursing at its congress in April 2000:

"We are putting nurses at the centre of the whole modernisation of the NHS,"

and said that because the health service is

"patient centred, it is nurse-centred too."

Those may be just meaningless words, or they could show a real commitment to doing something about the terrible plight of hospitals that are without sufficient nurses, as in my area, and about the unfairness that nurses have to deal with. I hope that they are more than words and that nurses will receive the rewards that they deserve, with the funding that the Government have finally put into the health service.

12.2 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on securing this timely and important debate. I also pay tribute to the nursing staff in the NHS, because as the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) said, they are the backbone of the health service. Without them, the health service could not function. All too often, their dedication and the commitment that they give to their vocation are overlooked and forgotten, although many hon. Members and our constituents have personal experience of how they look after people at vulnerable times in our lives.

As the Royal College of Nursing survey said, 63 per cent. of nurses are working in excess of their contracted hours by about seven hours a week, and 25 per cent. of that overtime is not repaid, either in time off in lieu or in money. That is a contributory factor to the nurse shortage in England of about 15,000.

The Minister will say that since September 1999 an extra 20,740 nurses have been employed. The fact remains that, regardless of that achievement, about 15,000 further nurses are needed to meet the increasing health care demands. I suspect that there are problems with filling vacancies for nursing staff in the constituencies of many hon. Members in the Chamber and elsewhere.

The Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS trust covers my constituency. The latest parliamentary answer that I received from the junior Health Minister, the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), was about the number of three-month vacancies there to March 2002, which are the latest figures that the Department of Health has. He said that the shortage in terms of all nurses was 20, and equally, the shortage in terms of all qualified nurses was 20. As many hon. Members have said today, nurse vacancies and nurse retention are at the heart of the problem, especially in areas with high living costs.

I suspect that the problem will be further exacerbated if the survey in *The Observer* last Sunday proves accurate. It showed that the percentage of nurses under the age of 40 who intended to leave the profession in the next five years had risen from 26 per cent. to 29 per cent. Equally worrying is the fact that the average age of those seeking to take up a career in nursing has risen to between 26 and 28 years old. Twenty or 25 years ago, when nursing was seen as a vocation that people would take up on leaving school, that average age was between 16 and 18. The difference is probably due to changes in society, with people wishing to start a family before embarking on a committed career. That is placing a strain on the system.

Pay has a major role to play in the equation of morale, retention, filling vacancies and recruitment. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire said that the Royal College of Nursing had submitted a paper to the independent pay review body, as other interested parties undoubtedly have, including the Government. As he said, the Government's submission to that body is the most important, because they will set the trend and try to point the body in their preferred direction, so far as they can. In drawing up their submission, the Government should understand exactly what is happening in the nursing profession, particularly because of the changes and the broadening of the skills and duties expected of nurses.

The introduction of the cost of living supplement has been a small step forward in helping nurses and other important workers on low pay. London has for many years had a weighting allowance to take into account the accepted fact that the costs of housing and living are higher in the capital city. In the home counties and sometimes further afield, living costs, especially of housing, have risen so dramatically that the difference between London and the rest of the country has been minimised. That was true over the last decade in particular, but the trend has been building up gradually over the past two decades. In areas such as Essex, Cambridgeshire and others from which it is possible to commute, the cost of living is significantly higher than in parts of the country that are far from the large metropolitan cities.

If my memory is correct, the cost of living supplement was introduced two years ago. What I found puzzling at the time—and I suspect that the Government did too, as they have remedied it this year—was that Essex was not included, despite the fact that it adjoins London and our house prices, house price inflation and other living costs are extremely high. Hertfordshire received the supplement and I believe that Cambridgeshire did too. Wiltshire and Dorset received it. Essex did not, which seemed a very odd decision. As I say, that decision has been rectified, which is welcome. However, as I said during my intervention on the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), the rules on the boundaries between who qualifies and who does not are too tight and seem unfair. I referred to a constituent who had been an auxiliary nurse for 27 years. Her working life has been dedicated to the national health service but she will not qualify as she does not have the necessary national vocational qualifications.

Mr. Lansley: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to Addenbrooke's hospital? As the hon. Member for Cambridge said, the fact that the cost of living supplement is not available for grades A and B has resulted in a vacancy level for health care assistants of 18 per cent. That is a substantial figure.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend is right. I hope that the Minister will reflect carefully on his points and those of the hon. Member for Cambridge. It is not only nurses who contribute to the quality of care in the NHS. The NHS also needs all the people who do other jobs and those people may be living in areas where the cost of living is high.

The Government have introduced the starter home initiative to support key workers. The Minister will note that the initiative applies not only to nurses but to teachers, police, firefighters and some other groups. Although those who qualify will warmly welcome the initiative, I suspect that it will only scratch the surface of the problem. In areas such as London, Chelmsford and Cambridgeshire—where house prices are high, where those prices continue to increase at a rate that is way above the rate of inflation, and where renting private accommodation is equally expensive—the initiative will not help as much as the Government would wish, because of the low number of those who will benefit.

For example, in Essex, five areas will come under the initiative—Basildon, Braintree, Chelmsford, Harlow and Maldon—but only 76 nurses in those areas, out of a total of just under 6,000, will be able to take part. The Minister would be right to say that some nurses will not wish or need to qualify because they may be married or may be more mature members of the work force who already have a home or an affordable rented property. However, a significant number of people will desperately wish to be part of the initiative and would benefit from it.

Will the Minister consider one other slightly baffling problem? The Royal College of Nursing, nurses themselves and others will say that they need higher levels of pay in recognition of the work that they do and the extended opportunities that are being offered to them.

Nurses are perplexed about the level of funding for agency nurses. Many agency nurses were originally NHS nurses who saw that if they became agency nurses they could work more flexible hours, or even fewer hours, with considerably more pay. It seems crazy that if we pay on average just over £500 million a year for agency nurses, we could not invest more of that money in NHS nurses as part of the programme to encourage recruitment and retention.

12.15 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on securing the debate. I pay tribute to the balanced way in which he presented his case. He refrained from making any party political points, and I shall try hard to do the same. All hon. Members who spoke in the debate made important, helpful and useful contributions.

I will deal with several points raised by the hon. Gentleman. Any neutral observer listening to him would probably have formed the impression that we were falling down in terms of nurse recruitment at Addenbrooke's—that there were fewer nurses and the vacancy rates were increasing—but the opposite is the case. The figures from 1997 to 2001 show that more than 300 additional nurses were employed by the Addenbrooke's NHS trust and that the vacancy rate fell from just over 16 per cent. to 9 per cent. That rate is far too high and I am certainly not going to say that all the recruitment and retention problems relating to nurses in the NHS have been solved. Quite palpably, those problems have not been solved. I would, however, argue that we are at least heading in the right direction, and it would be wrong to give the opposite impression. He asked in particular about foundation trusts and expressed an interest on behalf of Addenbrooke's in foundation trust status. More details about that status will be available in the near future.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) helpfully and kindly, as always, drew attention to some ancient correspondence that I had entered into with him. I have no recollection of that, but the point that he made about the reform of nurses' pay is valid, and I will return to that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) made a good contribution, particularly in drawing attention to the further help for student nurses that we are providing for child care costs—nearly £38 a week—which will go a long way. She made several good points and, overall, presented a balanced score card of what has been done and what still needs to be done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) drew attention to what she regards as problems that still need to be addressed in her constituency. I will come to that later.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) started well, but I am afraid that he succumbed to his typically curmudgeonly approach. He simply would not recognise any progress in the NHS if it were tattooed on his forehead, but there we are—we live in hope.

Several hon. Members spoke about the high cost of agency nurses and the problems that that poses for the NHS. Those problems are real, and we are spending far too much on commercial nursing agencies, but costs are coming down. We are making good progress, though not everywhere, and in Oxfordshire, for example, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon will know that progress has been made recently in developing and implementing NHS professionals and significant savings have been produced. That, too, is progress. I am advised that Addenbrooke's is reducing the amount that it spends on commercial agencies, and I hope that that trend continues.

There are two things that we can do to make a difference, in addition to wider points about improving the terms and conditions of NHS nursing staff, to which I shall return shortly. First, NHS professionals should be developed as an alternative to using commercial nursing agencies. That has enormous potential. Secondly, as a parallel development, we need to extend more actively throughout the NHS in England the benefits that we have already obtained in London from the London agency project. That is a better form of procurement for when we have to use commercial agencies. That certainly has benefits for the NHS. I think that, overall, those two initiatives will help in the long and medium term.

A number of key themes have emerged in the debate. We certainly need to get more nurses working in the NHS—that is common ground among all of us—and we are making progress with that. There have been many references to the figures. Since 1997, an extra 39,500 nurses have been recruited to the NHS. That figure takes into account those who have left, so that is a net increase of 39,500. However, we need to go further still. That is why the Budget settlement—a very good one for the NHS—will allow us to recruit 35,000 more nurses by 2008 than were working in the NHS in 2001.

As well as increasing the number of staff working in the NHS, we are also increasing the number of training places for students. Meeting those targets will be key to delivering longer-term sustained growth in the nursing profession. The NHS plan target is for 5,500 more nurses and midwives to enter training each year by 2004 than there were in 1999. We have already increased numbers by more than 3,000, and we are on course to deliver the target.

It is encouraging to note that applications for nurse diploma courses have nearly doubled in recent years, and nursing degrees are now the second most popular

[Mr. John Hutton]

university course in the country. Those are both positive developments, which show that we are at least moving in the right direction. Nursing is seen as an increasingly attractive career for young people, and that is important. We need to encourage that development at every turn.

Those increases in training mean that, by 2008, 60 per cent. more nurses will qualify each year than qualified this year, for example. However, we also need to encourage nurses who are already qualified to return to the NHS, because those nurses represent an extremely valuable resource and have experience. Since February 1999, more than 11,900 nurses, midwives and health visitors have returned to the NHS, and we need to continue promoting the ways in which qualified staff can return.

Increasing recruitment is only part of the solution. We also need to take action to retain those experienced nurses who are already working in the NHS. Obviously, pay forms an important part of getting that right, but as the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon said, other issues matter to nurses too. Such issues include, for example, better resources going into the front line to help them to do the job more effectively. We are trying to do that. Help with child care, more opportunities to develop skills, a better career structure, and measures to tackle violence against staff are important, and I am glad to say that we are taking action on all those subjects.

The Government are also committed to making the NHS a more attractive place in which to work. We can do that by offering better working conditions and improving lifelong learning opportunities—and offering improved child care support in order to help our employees balance work with their family commitments. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire is almost certainly aware, because he rightly takes a close interest in the work of the NHS locally, that Addenbrooke's hospital operates one of the largest child care facilities in the NHS, with 240 on-site nursery places.

Our campaign to improve the working lives of NHS staff lies at the heart of the drive to ensure that there are enough well qualified and motivated people in place to deliver the quality of health care envisaged in the NHS plan. Improving working lives places expectations on employers to support staff, promote their welfare and development, and respect their desire to have a healthy balance between work and life outside work.

I want to make it clear that the Government are committed to modernising the NHS pay system. As a number of hon. Members referred to the subject, it would be only right to draw attention to what the minimum starting salary for a grade D nurse was in 1997, and what it is in 2002. On 31 March 1997, a newly qualified grade D nurse starting work in the NHS earned just under £12,000 a year. On 1 April 2002, she would be earning £16,005 a year. That is a cash increase of 35 per cent. and a real terms increase of 16 per cent. I do not want to break my self-imposed discipline of not being party political, but that is nearly three times the rate of growth for the salary of newly qualified nurses that was experienced under the previous Conservative Administration. By any reasonable yardstick, our commitment to NHS pay, and especially nurses' pay, stands credible comparison.

As many hon. Members have said, however, we should go further. An independent pay review body has recommended the pay of nurses, midwives and health visitors since 1984. It makes its recommendations after considering evidence submitted from the Government, staff and professional organisations, and NHS employer organisations. For the past four years, the Government have implemented in full the recommendations of the pay review body and avoided the need to stage pay awards, which is an important objective.

Since 1997, real progress has been made in improving nurses' pay. Pay has increased across the board for all nurses and midwives by at least 26 per cent. in cash terms. Some grades of staff have been targeted for larger increases: I have already drawn attention to the starting salary of newly qualified nurses, which has risen by 35 per cent. over the same period. We also introduced the new post of nurse consultant to provide opportunities for staff at the top of the profession to continue to be involved in clinical work rather than moving into management. Nurse consultants can earn more than £46,000: a huge extension to the nursing career structure.

In response to the recommendations of the review body, this year nurses were once again awarded pay increases well ahead of inflation—an increase of 3.6 per cent. was implemented in April when the headline rate of inflation was only 1.5 per cent. We have taken additional action to support clinical leaders who are taking on more responsibilities. The starting pay of nurse consultants was increased by 15 per cent. and staff who took on modern matron roles—who have an important role to play in the NHS—had access to additional pay points worth at least 6.5 per cent.

We also took action to boost the pay of approximately 40,000 unregistered nursing support staff—a theme of the contribution of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns)—by guaranteeing a minimum cash increase of £400 a year. The increase can be up to 4.3 per cent. We have taken further action to encourage the culture of learning and development among non-registered staff. For example, we introduced an additional increment at the top of the pay scale for staff who have recently achieved national vocational qualifications. That increased by approximately 7 per cent. this year the pay of some nursing support staff who, as the hon. Gentleman said, do an important job in the NHS.

Those increases are all concrete and positive signs of the Government's commitment to improving nurses' pay. However, the Government recognise the particular problems of recruiting and retaining nurses and other staff in London and high-cost areas in the south of England, where, clearly, accommodation costs are high and where there are conditions of nearly full employment. Both my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire have rightly drawn attention to those issues, which are a problem throughout the public sector in London and the south-east. The Government are carefully considering what further action can be taken. For example, we have introduced new cost of living supplements for qualified nurses. The hon. Member for

West Chelmsford was highly critical of that initiative for not reaching enough staff. It focused on helping to solve some of the recruitment difficulties that are particularly associated with professionally qualified staff.

Mr. Burns: I am sorry if the Minister thought that I was being highly critical—I was simply trying to add weight to the point made by the hon. Member for Cambridge. The Government should reconsider widening the initiative to include other nursing staff and workers in the NHS on low pay. I was not trying to be highly critical.

Mr. Hutton: I stand corrected. However, in future the issue will be dealt with as part of the agenda for change negotiations.

Clearly, the Government can help with some problems in the NHS and not with others. The high cost of housing is a difficult problem and although we have done good work in the past two years in improving the number of low-cost additional units available for nursing and other NHS staff in London and across the south-east, I would be the first to accept that more needs to be done. We have had some progress, especially in Cambridgeshire, where 17 two-bedroom self-contained flats and six homes have been made available for local staff.

I have not had time to mention everything this morning, but I wish to say something about agenda for change, because many hon. Members have referred to it and it is important for the future. Nurses and other NHS staff clearly deserve to be paid fairly. Investment in pay, like every other area of future NHS spending, must pass a fundamental acid test: it must contribute to expansion in NHS capacity, bring about increases in NHS productivity and deliver improved NHS performance. We are working closely with the trade unions, professional organisations, the other UK Health Departments and NHS employer representatives to agree a new pay system for the NHS based on our agenda for change proposals.

The new pay system that is under discussion will have clear benefits for nurses and other NHS staff. Pay modernisation should ensure that nurses are rewarded fairly for the job that they do and for the skills and knowledge that their work requires. It will lead to an NHS in which staff are paid according to the work that they do, rather than, as at present, the job title that they hold. The nurse who takes on more responsibility or an extended role will get more pay. It will also support a better system of career progression by removing the artificial career ceilings associated with some parts of the current nurse clinical grading system.

Organ Retention

12.30 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I am pleased but saddened to raise the case of my former constituent, John Hall, who passed away on 3 June 1992. He was a brave man; like millions of his fellow citizens he served his country as a member of the armed services. He was a local councillor in Leicester, and subsequently in Leicestershire. His wife was a justice of the peace and served for a year as the lady mayoress of Leicester. They had three sons—Colin, Ian and Mark.

I have raised the case of John Hall before in the House—on 25 February 1992. I did so because John was a nuclear test veteran. He was born in Burnhope in county Durham, and he moved to Leicester in 1961. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1956, and he was an electrical mechanic who served with 76 squadron of the RAF, which did all the sampling of nuclear tests in the 1950s. The squadron was responsible for flying through the bomb clouds to pick up samples of radiated particles, and he was employed as an aircraft electrician serving the Canberra bombers used for that purpose. He served at RAF Edinburgh Field from 8 October 1957 until 19 August 1958, during which time he was detached with the squadron to Christmas island in the Pacific ocean from 3 March until 19 May 1958 for Operation Grapple Y. The squadron had gone there for the H-bomb test of 28 April 1958.

John Hall was treated for high-grade B-cell non-Hodgkins lymphoma, and subsequently for hairy-cell leukaemia. He received chemotherapy and other treatment at the local hospitals in Leicester.

I raised this case on the previous occasion because of the ongoing campaign for compensation for nuclear-test veterans. I do not wish to dwell on the history of that campaign because it has been aired on several occasions in the House, and it has been the subject of petitions to Ministers. Just before John Hall died, I had a meeting with the former Prime Minister, the then Member of Parliament for Huntingdon, Mr. John Major. Defence Ministers have also been involved in the matter, and the campaign continues. I pay tribute to the nuclear test veterans for the work that they have done, and to the newspapers that have supported them—*The People*, *The Independent* and, most recently, *The Mirror*.

The importance of Mr. Hall's case in the context of the previous campaign lies in what happened to his wife Marilyn a few weeks ago. I attended the funeral of John Hall, which took place in June 1992, as did many thousands of people from Leicester. I thought that the matter had then ended. However, a few weeks ago, I visited Marilyn and Colin Hall at their home. Marilyn burst into tears. She had just received a letter from the Leicester royal infirmary informing her that, when her husband died, his brain was removed, as were the other parts of his body that form tissue blocks, and that they had been retained at the hospital. The letter continued to say that the brain was disposed of seven years later through what the hospital described as the "hospital system". It was clearly shocking for the family to receive such a letter. Mrs. Hall has been so distressed that she could not be present to listen to the debate, but her son is watching our proceedings.

[Keith Vaz]

The tragedy of the case is that, after people bury their loved ones, they feel that that is the end of the matter. They do not believe, even in their wildest imagination, that years later they will discover that they have buried a person without his brain or other parts of his body. Marilyn Hall discovered what had happened only because she had listened to a programme on BBC Radio Leicester that featured another person talking about organ retention. That is why she wrote in.

The hospital did not offer to visit Mrs. Hall. It did not tell her in person about the terrible situation after it discovered that the brain had been removed and disposed of. It just wrote to her, and I have checked the facts because there was dispute about them.

Several questions arise from the case that affect not only my constituent, but people throughout the country. I am worried about the subject because my wife and I had a stillborn child in 1993. I discovered only while researching for this debate that the bodies of stillborn children were retained by several hospitals. I wonder what happened to the body of my child in 1993, and others will be worried about what happened to their loved ones.

I know what the Government have done about organ retention, and I pay enormous tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister, her team, previous Ministers and previous Secretaries of State for the way in which they reacted thoroughly to the Bristol case, its aftermath and the inquiry into it. That case primarily related to children's heart surgery and, at that time, everybody started to talk about organ retention. The case followed the inquiry into practice at Alder Hey children's hospital in Liverpool where it seemed that the retention of organs was especially common. There was a subsequent census by the chief medical officer of all organs and tissues retained.

The census showed that approximately 54,300 organs, body parts, stillbirths or foetuses were held by pathology services at the end of 1999. They had been retained from post mortems that occurred between 1970 and 1999. The holdings of 25 of the 220 national health service trusts and medical schools—12 per cent.—accounted for 88 per cent. of the total retentions. Nearly half the retained organs were brains, and a sixth were hearts. A total of 2,900 stillbirths or pre-viable foetuses were held. Organs were retained from 17,800 adults and 9,800 from children aged one to five, infants, stillborn babies or foetuses.

Several recommendations were proposed, and the Government accepted them all in full. I have enormous respect for my hon. Friend the Minister and I am sure that she will tell us about the good work that has been done on the code of practice and about changes made over the past 10 years. We accept that and welcome it. However, this case raises new questions. I am worried—I am sure that other hon. Members will be worried—about the number of members of the public who will contact hospitals after hearing about the case. We thought that the findings of the census would be the end of the matter.

When I met the health trust a few months ago, it assured me that it had searched through its files, cupboards and laboratories and it said that there was nothing left. However, Marilyn Hall was shocked to learn that information about John's brain had been discovered. When she asked why the brain had been taken, the hospital replied that it did not have any notes on the brain. We then asked how, if the hospital did not have any notes, it could know that the brain had been disposed off.

Can my hon. Friend the Minister produce the note that led the hospital to confirm that it had the brain in the first place and that the brain was subsequently disposed of? Secondly, what does disposal in the hospital system mean? We know that the brain was not buried with the body and that the tissue blocks are still with the royal infirmary. Surely the hospital should have come forward at some time during the seven years, told Mrs. Hall that it had discovered the brain and asked her what she wanted to do with it. She would most probably have replied that she wanted a reburial.

We are not talking about a small organ. I checked with the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor), who is the only doctor I know in the House. He told me that the brain is almost the same size as our skulls and that our skulls are comparatively thin. The brain is therefore a large organ. It is not easy to take such an organ from the laboratory or wherever the hospital was keeping it, put it somewhere else and then dispose of it. Was the brain buried? Where was it put? Was it incinerated? Are there any incineration records? Mrs. Hall and her family need to know the answer to those questions because that would reassure them about what has happened.

Can we now have an immediate audit of all the laboratories and all the facilities in Leicester so that no one else will get the terrible surprise that Mrs. Hall and her family have had to face? The brain was removed at the time when everyone knew that John Hall was a nuclear test veteran. We also know that a Ministry of Defence official attended the inquest because John served on Christmas island. Did the MOD have anything to do with the retention of his brain? Did it carry out any tests? Did it receive a report? Clearly if we are trying to make out a case that the leukaemia was caused by what happened on Christmas island, the retention of—and tests on—this organ was important. What was the involvement of the MOD? I will not accept the excuse that we sometimes hear that this is a matter involving the security or intelligence services. We want the facts about MOD involvement.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister meet urgently with her counterpart in the Home Office to discuss how coroners are involved in the system? The hospital says, "It is not our fault; the coroner made the order." Mrs. Hall did not consent. The hospital says that the issue is not about consent, but about whether a person objects. Bereaved people do not think about such things at the time. Why did the coroner make that decision? Can we have the coroner's files? Can we know who the coroner was? Can we know why he called the Ministry of Defence? Can we have all that information? I know that my hon. Friend cannot give us that information because it is held by the Home Office, but I do not want to hear her say that it is a matter for another Department. We want the facts of the case. We want to know what is happening.

As a general point, let us have better liaison between the coroners service and the health service. We know that the responsibilities of one stops and the other starts, but a great mystery surrounds coroners. I know that we watch "Silent Witness" on a Sunday night and see the work that Amanda Burton does. I wish that all the coroners and all the people associated with pathology were like those whom we see on television, but frankly, they are not. We do not know who they are, yet they make crucial decisions that affect the lives of people.

Finally, we need the Minister's assurance that there will be an inquiry. I know that it would be helpful to meet others to discuss the situation on the family's behalf, but they have had enough of meetings. They want to know the facts. They want an inquiry into the whole issue, and they want these matters brought to our attention. We know that the situation has changed and that things have become better, but we want to ensure that the truth comes out, not only for Marilyn Hall, but for people like me and my wife and the thousands of others who will hear about this case and be anxious about what might happen. The bodies of dead people need to be treated with respect, and especially that of John Hall given his record of service to the country. I knew John Hall, so in a sense this case matters more to me than some others. Dead bodies should not be hacked about in such a way, taken to pieces, and left in different parts of the home city, as they were in the case John Hall. I want to know what my hon. Friend the Minister will say about that, but I assure her that the matter will not stop here. We intend to pursue it until we get to the truth.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) has secured an extremely important debate. I am very aware of the keen interest that he has taken in the case of the late Mr. Hall, and that he has sought further information about the disposal of Mr. Hall's brain and other tissues. My hon. Friend has pursued the matter through a wide range of channels on behalf of Mr. Hall's family, and has raised important and pertinent questions. I will do my best to respond to them. There may well be matters of detail that I will need to follow up after the debate, but I give my hon. Friend my undertaking that I shall pursue the matter and ensure that he receives answers to his questions on behalf of the family.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the distress that this series of events has caused Mr. Hall's family. The recent discovery that Mr. Hall's organs and tissues had been retained by Leicester royal infirmary is of tremendous and understandable concern, especially as it came to light 10 years after Mr. Hall's death. I have had policy responsibility for this matter for the past 12 months, and I have met several families, especially in the Liverpool area, who have been involved with the issue of retained organs. I have met members of the various campaign groups, and have had first-hand experience of the depth of suffering, anguish and distress that many of those families have experienced as a result of the discovery that they made about the tissues and organs of members of their family. It is hard to overestimate the effect that that has had on families.

I want to set out the information that I have on why Mr. Hall's brain and other tissues were retained by the Leicester royal infirmary. I am advised that his brain was removed on 5 June 1992, at the request of the local coroner, so as to hold an inquest. The law provides that the coroner can request the retention of any organs or body tissue that may assist with an inquest. I also understand that following the coroner's inquest, the late Mr. Hall's brain was transferred to the Leicester royal infirmary's histopathology department, and booked into the neuropathology department on 12 June 1992. An histology sample was taken at that point, and the remainder of the brain was stored in the tissue store until it was disposed of by, I am told, incineration—which was the normal hospital practice—on 13 December 1993.

There is a lengthy gap between 12 June 1992 and December 1993,and it is right to ask why the brain was kept for such a long period after the inquest. The disposal of Mr. Hall's brain was carried out in accordance with the protocols that pertained in the hospital at that time. My hon. Friend has gone through the history relating to the inquiry by the chief medical officer and the recommendations of the Alder Hey report, but every one of us would acknowledge that past systems were not perfect. They did not function in a way that recognised the dignity and the rights of the individuals and families concerned. That was the widespread practice throughout the country; it does not apply just to Leicester.

The Government take the matter seriously and have taken action to ensure that, in future, the systems work for people in local communities. Too often, consent was not sought. Partly as a result of a paternalistic system that attempted to protect people, such issues were not raised in discussions and in consultation between clinicians and families so routine consent was not sought. I stress that we have acted to ensure that that is no longer the case and, in every case, families must give their informed consent. That is the bottom line.

The law allows the coroner specifically to request the retention of organs or tissue to establish the cause of death. As my hon. Friend says, consent is not a requirement; it is a matter for the coroner to carry out an investigation. Systems need to be improved so that families are part of the process, and do not feel that people are riding roughshod over them.

The law governing organ and tissue retention—in particular, the Human Tissue Act 1961—is unclear, ambiguous and outdated. The law has, in any event, been poorly understood and, as a result, it has not been applied well. Custom and practice developed within the framework of the law and relied too heavily on the traditional attitudes of the people involved in a paternalistic system. The benefits of teaching and research were recognised, but the wishes and feelings of families were not sufficiently balanced with the need for teaching and research. The balance in the previous system was wrong.

The removal and use of tissue samples and organs in medical research and education has significant implications for everyone's health. The development of new drug therapies, the diagnosis of existing conditions and the training of medical professionals rely heavily on the donation of tissue and organs. Many people are happy to donate organs if that has been discussed with

[Ms Hazel Blears]

them and they are able freely and properly to consent to it. However, as this case illustrates, in the past, families were not always asked for their consent. That is why things went wrong.

In March 2000, we began to reform matters dramatically, setting out interim guidance to try to ensure that, from that point onwards, appropriate consent was given for hospital post-mortem examinations and for the retention of organs. That was followed up last year with further advice about the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue, and 17 recommendations were made to change the practice and culture across the NHS. Major changes are now being proposed in the way that consent is sought. Families have had an input into the codes of practice that have been developed to work practically. There will be new regulatory controls and a wholly new framework of law for the system.

My hon. Friend raised the role of the coroner, which is most important. I am pleased to be able to tell him that part of the programme of work being carried out in response to the chief medical officer's recommendations is a review led by the Home Office in close contact with the Department of Health about the operation of the coroners service. The systems should not operate in isolation. They should be integrated and form part of the same framework and ethos that we are trying to establish in the health service.

Keith Vaz: I do not want to interrupt my hon. Friend, and I am grateful for the information that she has provided. However, I raised several specific points about this case. If she does not have time to reply to all of them, will she agree to meet Mrs. Hall, her family and me in the near future so that the rest of the answers can be given? The problem with ministerial replies is that they raise more questions that require still further debate. It would save time if we could meet in the near future.

On another important point, is my hon. Friend satisfied that today no organs that are unaccounted for are retained at the Leicester royal infirmary?

Ms Blears: On my hon. Friend's last point, I understand that 142 organs are retained by the university hospitals of Leicester and the NHS trust. It is the role of the Retained Organs Commission, which was established by the Government, to carry out an audit of where organs are located throughout the country and to assist the trusts and families in organising the sensitive return of organs when the families want that. The system works through families contacting the trusts to make inquiries about whether any organs are held. A search is then carried out of all the relevant databases to establish whether organs are held, and that is followed by a proper discussion with the families to find out what they want done with the tissues, blocks, slides, organs and so forth. Do they want a burial or would they rather that the hospital disposed of the remains? Everything is done very sensitively.

Let me make it clear to Mr. Hall's family that, if they wish, the Retained Organs Commission can get in touch with them. Part of its role is to act as an advocate for families in these difficult circumstances and to discuss problems with the hospitals.

Keith Vaz: We will discuss this case with the commission, but the family would like to meet my hon. Friend the Minister. I know how busy she is, but these matters must be resolved. They have dragged on for 10 years. If the questions cannot be answered today, it would be helpful to arrange such a meeting.

Ms Blears: My ministerial colleague, the parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), is in charge of this policy area. If outstanding matters remain, I am sure that a meeting could be arranged, but I can provide my hon. Friend with further information today. I am advised that the normal system used was incineration and that the organ was disposed of in accordance with normal protocols. I shall press the hospital to establish what records are available and when notes were made.

As to the Ministry of Defence, I am advised that it did not contact the trust or the coroner at any time, and I can supply that information to my hon. Friend today. I have already dealt with the Home Office review and I can confirm that close and ongoing work and liaison between the Department of Health and the Home Office is taking place and will continue in respect of this matter.

Over the past few years, the Retained Organs Commission has acquired a wealth of experience in helping families in these circumstances and it would be more than happy to get in touch with the family and liaise with the trust on its behalf to acquire any further helpful information.

Finally, we have issued a consultation document, "Human Bodies, Human Choices", which is all about advancing a fundamental review of the law in this sphere. Several workshops that included family members were conducted, so it is not a matter of only the Government making proposals. We are going out to people and asking what would work for them in the future. The consultation period ended in the middle of October and we are examining what we can do now to proceed as quickly as possible. Families want the recommendations of the chief medical officer enshrined in a whole new legal framework. I am acutely aware of the distress, trauma and pain caused to hundreds of families up and down the country. Clearly, Mr. Hall's family is feeling that pain. We are determined to ensure that this difficult and sensitive matter is handled properly in future, and that Mrs. Hall's legitimate concerns are answered as far as possible by giving the family a clear picture of what happened and information about why and what they can do now to ensure that any remaining tissues are disposed of as sensitively as possible.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): I thank the Minister for her reply. If there is further information on the points raised by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), it would be helpful if it were placed in the Library. It would be beneficial if as much information as possible were available on this issue.

Local Government Finance (Norfolk)

1 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I am greatly obliged for the opportunity to speak on this important subject, not only for my constituents but for those of parliamentary colleagues.

This debate is part of a wider campaign for a fair deal for Norfolk and it has all-party support. I am very grateful for the attendance of my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and the hon. Members for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright). All the Norfolk Members of Parliament support the campaign, and I am sure that at some stage the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, will, perhaps behind the scenes, press Norfolk's case.

I hope that the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), will concentrate in his reply on the specifics to do with Norfolk. I think that, within reason, all hon. Members are aware of the general background. I attended the ministerial briefing last month, for which I was grateful. The Minister gave a lot of time to members of all parties on the consultation paper.

I make no bones about the fact that this debate is part of a Norfolk lobby aimed at influencing the Government's provisional announcement at the beginning of December. As politicians, we all learn that it is no good making a noise after a decision has been made; it is best to do so before.

In many ways, understanding local government finance is like Palmerston's famous comment about the Schleswig-Holstein question: only three people knew about it; one was dead, one was mad, and the third had forgotten what the question was. This is a horrendously complex subject. There has been wide agreement that the current system needs changing, but that does not mean that the Government's wide range of options has met with universal approval.

One problem that I want to flag up straight away is that there has been considerable uncertainty because of the range of options. That has made it exceptionally difficult for Norfolk county council and the district councils to plan ahead for the next year; budget decisions have to be made now.

I deal now with the question of fair funding for Norfolk. The Minister will be aware that counties as a group do not do well out of current arrangements, and that historically—not only under this Government, but under previous Governments—Norfolk has received below county average standard spending assessment per head of population. The gap between Norfolk and the county average produces a shortfall in funding of almost £10 million a year, which is equivalent to 5 per cent. in council tax.

We all agree that the old SSA system needed to be changed. Indeed, Norfolk county council and the district councils have warmly welcomed the Government's attempts in that regard and have fully participated in the research. The real question is fairness. When we examine the formula proposals in detail, we feel that they do not impact fairly across the regions or the types of authorities. There seems to be a range of potential outcomes. There are some 80 different options in the Government's proposals. Depending on how they are balanced, under the new formula proposals Norfolk could in theory gain £28 million. However, it could lose £33 million. The county council certainly fears that we shall be in the category of net loss rather than net gain, and that is before we consider the major funding pressures that it is already under.

The county council has identified cost pressures for the years 2003–04 at £47.9 million in mid-September. Since September a further £2.8 million of mainly Government-driven changes has been added, making the current total slightly more than £50 million. There are major sources of funding pressure. The impact on council tax of £50 million of additional pressure equates to an increase in that tax of nearly 19 per cent.

We must also bear in mind one of the main thrusts of the Government's policy—resource equalisation. In many respects that is the most contentious element in the proposals. Most of the Members of Parliament in Norfolk, let alone the eastern region, see that as a technical way of transferring more resources to high-spending councils in other parts of the United Kingdom. That alone could lose Norfolk county £10 million, and Norfolk police authority £1.5 million. The consequences for the county are, therefore, enormous.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk) *rose—*

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth) *rose—*

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. Before I take interventions, it is the custom of the House, and the Speaker requires it, that Members who wish to make interventions should inform the hon. Member who secured the debate, the Minister and the Chairman. At this stage, only one Member has notified me of his wish to intervene. If Members wish to intervene, they should observe the courtesies of the House.

Mr. Bellingham: I apologise, Mr.Hancock, for not informing you first. I would be grateful if my hon. Friend would elaborate on his poin. about policing. That point is of great importance to North-West Norfolk, because of the fens project, a tripartite scheme with Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. That project shares resources and intelligence, and was set up in the aftermath of the Tony Martin case. If the funds are not forthcoming for that project, it will probably collapse. That would be a disaster for my constituency, and for that of my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard).

Mr. Simpson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue. Norfolk has benefited from the rural policing grant that was introduced in 2000–01, gaining £2 million as a result. The new proposals consolidate the RPG into a general funding formula, but at too low a level—1 per cent. rather than 1.4 per cent. As a result, the grant for rural police authorities will be reduced, which will have a major impact on nearly all our constituencies.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: I also apologise, Mr. Hancock, for not mentioning to you that I wished to intervene. I did not mean to be discourteous.

[Mr. Anthony D. Wright]

Over the past few years we have seen a growth in resources for the police and education, and we fear that the new formula will turn the clocks back, and perhaps make the situation worse than it was previously. We want to see the current growth as a burden on the government grants system rather than on the individual ratepayers of Norfolk and of my constituency, Great Yarmouth.

Mr. Simpson: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. There may be other parts of the country that have requirements, but Norfolk's existing resources are likely to be taken away. The situation could get worse. The figures given earlier assume a 3 per cent. floor, yielding approximately £12 million. The Government have guaranteed that the grant for 2002–03 will be no less, in cash terms.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I want to reiterate the concern about matching the grant for last year. That sounds great, but in practice it could be a disaster. Increases in salaries and national insurance, and extra burdens such as recycling, will substantially increase the base cost for local authorities. It is therefore essential that we receive more than last year, rather than simply keeping pace with it.

Mr. Simpson: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): If Mr. Hancock will allow it, will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): The hon. Gentleman is being extraordinarily patient with everyone.

Mrs. Shephard: This is an all-Norfolk, and indeed an all-party occasion. If the Government kept their promise of guaranteeing no less a grant in cash terms than for 2002, what does my hon. Friend think that would mean in terms of an increase in council tax for the people of Norfolk? It is an empty promise, because the increased pressure to spend would mean an increase in council tax.

Mr. Simpson: Once again, my right hon. Friend presses me on the figures. In the worst-case scenario, Norfolk would be £12 million worse off. That would mean a further 6 per cent. increase in council tax, making a total increase of about 24 per cent. That would be politically unacceptable, if not political suicide. It is a major problem.

Next is the question of predictability. Even the floor of 3 per cent. might be in place for only one year. The Government have not yet confirmed how long it will continue, and it may not be enough to compensate for formula terms.

I turn briefly to the equally important question of fair funding for Norfolk's policy authority. The current funding system once again means that the average funding per head of population in the most rural counties, including Norfolk, is £3.23 a head below the national average. If Norfolk police were funded to the average shire level, it would have received £2.6 million a year. The current council tax precepts for policing show that taxpayers in the most rural police authority areas pay £14 a year more than in urban areas. Why?

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): My hon. Friend makes a good point about rural police forces. Is he aware that Norfolk constabulary, whose new headquarters is in my constituency, faces additional spending pressures of up to £9.5 million, most of which is statutorily required, and that it estimates it will receive between £300,000 more and £6 million less? How are we supposed to make up the difference?

Mr. Simpson: The options available to the county and the police authority are simple. First, they can try to be more efficient, and it is fair to say that Norfolk county council, the district councils and the police authority are driving as hard as they can to make efficiency savings. Their second choice would be to make cuts, which would be politically unacceptable. Thirdly, the council tax would have to be increased by so much that that, too, would be politically unacceptable.

The notional cost of the loss of £6 million for the police authority mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) would equal 200 policemen. However, the county council and the police authority are already under considerable pressure, without looking to the future and considering the impact of the Government's new formula. My hon. Friend touched on the fact that all those authorities already face new statutory burdens, rightly introduced by the Government to raise standards. For example, as employers, the county council and the police authority will suffer the impact of increased national insurance contributions, which will cost them £800,000 next year.

I want to leave the Minister plenty of time to reply, but in closing I want to return to an important point touched upon by several of my hon. Friends. The Minister for Local Government and the Regions—I see that he is responsible also for fire fighting, which is a happy combination—wrote a letter to the *Eastern Daily Press* on 2 November. That was just after I heard I had been given this Adjournment debate—another happy connection. In that letter, he wrote:

"It seems that councils in the county"—

Norfolk—

"are unaware of the guarantee I have made to local government that no local authority will get less grant than they got last year on a like-for-like basis".

That sounds like good news, but when we examine those words in detail—the hon. Member for North Norfolk alluded to this—we find that they are slightly misleading, to say the least. First, the guarantee appears to be for only one year, which is pretty limited. Secondly, the Government have budgeted for an increase in money to local government, but they expect councils to spend more than the amount of that grant on public services. Thirdly, as we all know, much of the money that goes to councils is ring-fenced, so they have little flexibility. The situation reminds me of the old Sam Goldwyn comment that a verbal guarantee is not worth the paper it is written on.

The Minister must be aware that Norfolk took a positive attitude when it entered the discussions on reforming local government finance. When it examined

the options, however, it concluded that, whatever the criteria, it would be at the end of the spectrum where the figures came with minus signs attached. Those Members who are present believe that that is unfair, and I look to the Minister to come up with some hard facts to reassure us. When the proposals are announced at the beginning of December, I hope that we will be able to say that Norfolk has got a fair deal. At the moment, the suspicion is that it has not.

1.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on securing the debate, not least because the subject has exercised almost every Member of Parliament. Indeed, we have already had a detailed and lengthy debate in the main Chamber about the formula grant review.

Many hon. Members are rightly extremely concerned about funding for their local services, and such issues are raised in many of our surgeries. The hon. Gentleman said that the debate was a shameless lobbying exercise on behalf of Norfolk, and it has been very successful, judging by the turnout of Opposition Members representing Norfolk and the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright).

I shall deal with the specifics of Norfolk in a moment. The hon. Gentleman suggested that everyone was familiar with the broader issue, but it is worth touching on some general aspects of local government funding and on our intentions for change. I shall not repeat much of what I said in the main Chamber, but I should emphasise that we shall see the demise of the old standard spending assessment—the SSA system. We want to move away from the practice of central Government telling local authorities that their spending should or should not be at a particular level. We want to find ways of giving them greater freedoms and greater flexibility so that they can be more directly accountable to local people. That means that we must get away from the SSA system and focus on how we divide up grant—the money that actually goes to local authorities. The SSA system will be no more.

Even if more money is available to authorities—and it will be, given the announcements made in the spending review—they will not all be able to have a bigger slice of the cake, because that is statistically impossible. It is therefore unsurprising that the Government have received strong representations from many authorities. We want to consider the relative circumstances of different authorities, and to try as best we can to base decisions on need. We will consider several different factors to determine grant.

The right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) queried the guarantee that we have been able to give so far that there will be no cash loss, on a like-for-like basis, for particular authorities. That does not mean that it is the optimum guarantee; it is the minimum guarantee that we can give while we are still gathering statistical evidence to produce the formula. We hope to do much better.

Mrs. Shephard: That was not the point. I was asking what the impact would be on the Norfolk council tax payer if the Government managed to keep the guarantee.

Mr. Leslie: As I say, I hope that we can do better than the no cash loss guarantee. I shall mention later the extra education money that we have allocated. That has enabled us to guarantee a real terms increase in education services. That is the largest component of the formula grant review.

I must record my appreciation for Norfolk county council's work with the county council network in devising some of the formula options that we have discussed. It helped to commission research on formula change to distribute mental health service moneys, and on how to take account of additional costs associated with providing home care services in rural areas. The research and its implications have been considered carefully and are reflected in the options that are in the consultation package with which hon. Members are familiar.

Norman Lamb: The Minister mentioned the cost of services in rural areas. The rural services partnership, which represents the 50 most rural councils in the country, is concerned that inadequate attention is being given to rural deprivation. It is often hidden, but it does exist in Norfolk. It is essential for any new formula to take account of such concerns.

Mr. Leslie: That is a fair point, particularly as far as education funding is concerned. A number of authorities serve sparsely populated areas, so the Government think that the formula should reflect sparsity, as it affects the cost of home to school transport in rural areas and the help required for rural primary schools. In the course of research, we found that sparsity may make a difference in respect of primary schools but the case is less clear in respect of secondary schools. There is likely to be as many small secondary schools in densely populated metropolitan areas as there are in shire counties such as Norfolk. Nevertheless, we recognise that secondary school pupils often have to travel further to get to school in sparsely populated areas, which is why we have examined our transport expenditure options. We hope that the new formula will cover 60 per cent. of the transport element of the LEA block through the sparsity index and 40 per cent. through the number of pupils covered by the authority. That will reflect the high levels of transport expenditure in sparsely populated LEA areas such as Norfolk.

The Government want a fairer, clearer system justified by the educational needs of children and based on the evidence of cost and need. I can give a commitment that no local authority schools will lose out in real terms. In addition, all local education authorities will benefit from increased funding over the next three years, following the Chancellor's spending review announcements.

Mr. Simpson: Does the Minister know whether the Government will compensate the county council for the

[Mr. Simpson]

increase in teachers' pension contributions? Giving welcome money with one hand and taking it away with the other will have a major impact on the education budget.

Mr. Leslie: I often find Conservative Members arguing for higher and higher public expenditure. That is understandable in many respects. We intend to ensure that, where appropriate, we reflect additional pay costs. The additional costs adjustment is controversial among many MPs, but we will take pay costs into account. Deprivation is also extremely important, and we would not want our debate to go by without considering additional educational needs and the education spend. The options that we set out in the consultation paper reflect several variants on how deprivation can be taken into account, and we intend to introduce a phasing-in period for some of the proposed changes.

I appreciate that expenditure on policing is an issue close to the hearts of all our constituents. The aim of the police formula review is to develop a robust mechanism for distributing Government grant fairly and simply. There are many different pressures in rural and metropolitan areas, and we are anxious to do our best to allocate resources as fairly as we can. Any extremes at either end of the options illustrated in the consultation package will be tempered by the floors-and-ceilings mechanism with which hon. Members are familiar. Of course, those floors and ceilings are applied after the calculation of the grant, and announcements on that will be made shortly. However, it is important to remember that we are taking decisions against a background of substantial increases in expenditure on the police. By 2005–06, the total provision for policing will be about £1.5 billion more than it was in this financial year.

The hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) asked us to concentrate on issues affecting Norfolk. To set those issues in context, I point out that, in the past five years, there has been a 20 per cent. increase in real-terms expenditure for local government, compared with a 7 per cent. reduction in the last four years of the Conservative Administration. We have continued to prioritise education and social services, on which there will be a 6 per cent. increase in expenditure over the next three years.

Mr. Bacon *rose—*

Mr. Simpson *rose—*

Mr. Leslie: I know that Conservative Members are champing at the bit to ask about the Norfolk settlement. I understand that Norfolk county council has benefited significantly from our extra investment in local government. Under this Government, there has been an average increase in the grant of about 4.9 per cent. compared with an increase of 2.1 per cent. in the last four years of the Conservative Administration. We have managed to sustain an average increase of more than twice the rate set by the Conservatives.

Mr. Simpson: The Minister has misjudged the mood of the debate. This is not a party-political issue. We understand that the Government have increased the money available in certain areas but have imposed new requirements on Norfolk county council, and I have quoted the figures. With the best will in the world, people in Norfolk and hon. Members who represent Norfolk constituencies believe that we currently have a net loss and that, under the Government's proposed formula, we are likely to be worse off. Can the Minister guarantee that, when he makes his announcement at the beginning of December, we will be able to say that the Government have given Norfolk a fair deal and that Norfolk will not be worse off?

Mr. Leslie: I can most certainly guarantee that Norfolk will receive a fair deal, and I can guarantee right now that there will be no cash loss for councils. I can put people's minds at rest about the more extreme options in the consultation document.

I want to touch on the important issue of social services, about which I know that hon. Members are concerned. This year, there has been a 5.8 per cent. increase in expenditure on social services; a 15.9 per cent. increase in the children's grant and a 21.9 per cent. increase in carers grant. Similarly, in education, the standard spending assessment for Norfolk has increased by 36 per cent. in five years. Those are significant sums of money. On police funding, there are extra officers—more than ever before.

A formula grant review consultation is now underway. We are involving as many people as possible and have heard representations. Floors and ceilings will be introduced to give the measure of protection that hon. Members are concerned about. We try to take a balanced view at all times. It is difficult to make everyone a winner, but the Government are putting in much extra investment. That investment will be the message that will come out of the announcements that we make in December. We want a more transparent system, but we also want to make sure that we have decent investment and public services.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): We are about to move on to the next debate but, before we do, I remind hon. Members that in Westminster Hall there is a convention that if hon. Members are to make an intervention, they must inform the Member who initiated the debate, the Minister and the Chairman. To my knowledge, no one has done that. On this occasion, I am prepared to give way on the issue, but hon. Members should be mindful of that duty.

Portland Search and Rescue Helicopter

1.30 pm

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I am grateful to be granted this debate on the future of the Portland search and rescue helicopter. The threatened transfer of that service to Lee-on-the-Solent represents a threat to the Dorset economy and marine safety in south-west England and, most importantly, would lead to a needless loss of life.

I am grateful to the Minister and officials of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency for meeting me on many occasions in the past six months to discuss my concerns about the proposals. Equally, I am grateful to my fellow hon. Members, some of whom are present, for their support in the campaign. I know that the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) would have liked to be here, but were unable to. Thanks must principally go to the many members of the public—including the 25,000 who have petitioned me on the subject—who have given so much momentum to the campaign.

Last night, I visited the website of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. The first thing to greet me was the inevitable vision statement. It reads:

"Our vision is to be a world class organisation that is committed to preventing loss of life, continuously improving safety and protecting the marine environment."

None of us could argue with that, but moving the service from Portland to Lee-on-the-Solent is totally contrary to that vision.

The current uncertainty has come about because of the need to replace the existing hangar at Portland. The hangar is located at Osprey quay, which is being redeveloped by the South West of England regional development agency following its sale by the Ministry of Defence. Although the coastguard hangar needs replacement, the requirement has been brought forward because of the RDA's need to redevelop the site. When that first emerged a few years ago, there was agreement in principle between the RDA and the MCA, but negotiations subsequently broke down over the flood risk to the site.

At that time, the MCA looked for alternative sites from which to operate the service, and judged that it would be viable and cheaper to operate from the existing hangar at Lee-on-the-Solent, which, incidentally, is old and in need of replacement. Retaining the service at Portland is now regarded as an extra cost. The issue is less about running costs than about the cost of building the hangar. That, as I understand it, remains the key outstanding issue.

The search and rescue helicopter Whisky Bravo covers the coast from Poole harbour to Start Point. West of Start Point, cover from Culdrose and Chivenor is provided by the Ministry of Defence. Whisky Bravo operates 12 hours a day, and is the biggest civilianised search and rescue helicopter in Britain. At the beginning of this week, it had responded to 177 incidents this year, as opposed to 165 at Lee-on-the-Solent, 112 at Stornoway and 75 at Sumburgh. All are operating at half the hours of Portland, and yet none are busier. That makes the idea of removing the service from that section of the coast somewhat bizarre. Would not the logical development be to increase the service at Portland to 24 hours and make savings elsewhere?

The idea of 24-hour working has been proposed to the MCA and has been shown to be possible. I know that the MCA response would be that it is not considering removing the service, but simply relocating it to Lee-on-the-Solent, 51 nautical miles away, and that it is possible to operate the service from there and still meet the national guidelines for response times. However, I question that, and I shall explain why.

Let me first deal with the substantive point. The MCA would be moving an emergency service away from its busiest area. The estimated flying time between Lee-on-the-Solent and Portland is 28 minutes. At a time when ambulances are trying to reduce their response times, the MCA is considering increasing its response time by 28 minutes. That would be a cut in the quality of the service and would go against the MCA's vision of preventing loss of life.

I shall read from a letter from Dr Karim, who is the senior house surgeon in the accident and emergency department of Dorset county hospital. He comments on a patient who, in May this year, was in the water at Durdle Door for approximately 15 minutes before being rescued. The response time of the Portland search and rescue helicopter was just three minutes, and the rescue and the delivery to Dorchester took just another five minutes. Dr Karim says:

"It is my professional opinion that"

my patient

"was very lucky to have survived this incident and had the Air Sea Rescue helicopter been delayed by only a further 5 minutes he would most certainly have died."

That patient was very lucky—only a further five minutes, not a further 28 minutes, and he would have died. If Portland had been closed, that patient would have died, and he would not have been the only one this year. Whisky Bravo's crews have rescued several people this summer who would have died had the response time been significantly longer.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important Adjournment debate. He will know that Torbay is one of the country's main maritime playgrounds. Moving the helicopter will increase rescue times in the summer when—as we joke—the Birmingham navy comes to play. That is a joke, but there is a serious point. Inexperienced people can get into difficulties at sea and minutes can save lives. We are right behind the hon. Gentleman.

Jim Knight: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support. He makes a good point, and I shall mention Torbay a little later on.

The crews of Whisky Bravo are to receive a bravery award at 10 Downing street later this month. I cannot understand how the MCA can even consider relocating this service in the knowledge that doing so will cost lives. I have said that the relocation fulfils national guidelines, which require a helicopter to reach an incident in a high-risk area within one hour; but I shall explain what would happen if there were an incident immediately off Portland. The contractor would have to be airborne within 15 minutes and flying time to the incident would be about 28 minutes, depending on wind speed and direction. On a good day, the response time would therefore be 43 minutes. That is fine, and within the

[Jim Knight]

guidelines. If, however, the incident were off Torbay, another 25 minutes would be added and the test would be failed. A helicopter would have to be sent from Culdrose. That helicopter could get to the incident in 15 minutes, but it would leave the busy Cornish coast with no cover.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I, too, would like to congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Will he join me in congratulating the personnel at Culdrose on their incredible work? Does he agree that, if the relocation goes ahead, it could have a serious impact on the lives of the mariners on the west coast of Cornwall whom I represent?

Jim Knight: I agree. The reduction in service would have knock-on effects around the coast. That reduction would have to be compensated for, which would mean an increased work load for Culdrose. Anyone who represents a constituency in the south-west peninsula ought to be concerned about those effects.

Between Torbay and Portland is Lyme Bay, which is in a grey area. It would be a struggle to get there in time, especially when the weather was bad—which, of course, is just when rescue services are likely to be needed. A further problem would be the need to refuel between incidents, which entails returning to base or, if pushed, to an airport such as Bournemouth or Exeter. Hon. Members will understand that, on a busy day, Whisky Bravo would really struggle to fulfil its minimum requirements.

I imagine that the MCA has carried out a risk assessment for such eventualities, and I should be grateful if the Minister would arrange for a copy to be placed in the House of Commons Library. I believe that the existing guidelines are flawed and I would respectfully suggest to the Select Committee on Transport that it consider them the next time it discusses the operation of the MCA. The guidelines should differentiate between different types of incident.

I also understand that a review of national search and rescue cover is due in the next few years through the Ministry of Defence. The MCA has explored the possibilities of sites for basing the helicopter other than the site at Portland in Dorset, but to no avail. If the agency abandons Portland now, it cannot go back, and it will have prejudged the outcome of that national review for the south coast. That cannot be right. Incidentally, the savings made by civilianising the service nationally would pay for a new hangar at Portland every year.

Any review must look for differential guidelines for different types of incident. Divers, for example, need to be taken to a decompression unit quickly—normally within 30 minutes—to prevent permanent or fatal damage. This year, there have so far been 50 incidents of divers being taken to the pool decompression unit by Whisky Bravo. Of those incidents, 17 were assessed as requiring rapid decompression to save life. Those divers could not have waited for the aircraft to come from Lee-on-Solent; they would have died or suffered serious permanent disability.

The guidelines make no allowance for such incidents, and they should do so. If an area attracts a high number of incidents that require a faster medical response than the national guideline of one hour, the guidelines should be changed to reflect that fact.

There are other reasons why we need the service to remain at Portland. One reason is our economy. Tourism is the most important local industry to us on the south Dorset coast. Last December, the Dorset and east Devon coast received world heritage status from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Our coast uniquely exposes a perfect geological time line of the Jurassic age. The result, we hope, will be an increase in visitors coming to see the varied beauty of the area, from walkers on the coastal path to dinghies and small boats on the sea. We are already experiencing that increase. Each year, Whisky Bravo responds to 30 or 40 incidents from cliff top walkers and climbers. With world heritage status and the encouragement that we are giving to visitors, that number can only rise.

The Portland sailing academy sits alongside the Whisky Bravo hangar. The academy is the home of our national youth sailing teams, and if any hon. Members come to Portland harbour in the summer they will see those teams in training, including many of our Olympic medallists. The academy is the subject of a large lottery bid, which will develop the National Sailing Academy for the Royal Yachting Association. Sailing and water sports are the leading economic development driver for the area according to Weymouth and Portland borough council, and they are assessed as the leading economic driver for the area by the regional development agency, yet we are set to abandon them. Each year, Whisky Bravo responds to 40 or 50 incidents involving small boats and windsurfers. With the development of the sailing academy, the numbers will rise, as will the risk to the lives of people participating in those sports.

Removing Whisky Bravo puts at risk the economic development of our area, which will lose its reputation as a safe place to visit.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) on securing the debate and thank him for allowing me to intervene. As he knows, I represent an area to the east of his constituency, and our economies are inextricably linked. Does he agree that the views of those in the east and the hinterland of Poole harbour are just as strong as those in his own area and in the west? The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) and I have received thousands of representations. The move will have an impact on the local economy and activity, because people value the service greatly and we have many visitors to the harbour.

Jim Knight: I am grateful for the intervention. I agree that there is a strong link between the economies of my constituency and the Poole area. In fact, I represent 80 per cent. of the Poole harbour area, so I would certainly agree on that score.

There is nationwide interest in the issue. The 25,000 signatures do not come from constituents alone, but from divers, windsurfers, sailors and walkers from all over the British Isles who come to the Dorset coast and

expect to have a safe experience. I plead with the Minister to make the right decision, and to tell us when it will be announced. We have made good progress. The cost of building the hangar has fallen since a solution to the flood risk was found, which was funded by the regional development agency. We simply must find the money now to build the replacement hangar at Portland.

I ask the Minister to listen to hon. Members, to the regional media and to the 25,000 petitioners and save our life-savers. What is a couple of million quid against the many lives that have been saved this year by the busiest search and rescue helicopter in the country?

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) on securing the debate, on the way in which he has conducted it and on his campaign during the past six months. He is certainly a tireless campaigner for his constituents. I have to say that I have felt, on occasions, almost as if I was being harassed by my hon. Friend, because every time I appeared somewhere he would dive on me and question me. I say, good for him, because Members of Parliament are here to give us a hard time about such things. He has missed no opportunity to make his point. I understand the powerful points that he has made today about safety, and I am also mindful of the other issues that he mentioned, such as the importance of inward investment to the Dorset coast and other parts of the region.

My hon. Friend has detailed much of the background, but it is appropriate to place the Portland helicopter issue in a national context. Before doing that, just as my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) praised those who operate out of Culdrose, I would like to put on record my tribute to the courage and utter dedication, sometimes in the most extreme circumstances, of those who crew the nation's search and rescue helicopters. This is a very worthy subject and we should place on record our thanks to those people as a tribute to the work that they do on behalf of the people of this country.

The House will be aware that the helicopter that covers the Portland area is part of a national helicopter search and rescue coverage organisation. There are 12 search and rescue bases throughout the United Kingdom; eight are military bases and four are civil. Portland is one of the civil bases. With the exception of Portland, the bases operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Portland aircraft operates for 12 hours a day, from 9 am to 9 pm each day all year round. That aircraft replaced the helicopter that was previously operated by the Royal Navy from the base hitherto known as HMS Osprey. The Portland helicopter is operated by Bristow Helicopters Ltd. under a contract to the MCA. According to the operational criteria for search and rescue helicopters that work 24 hours a day, civil aircraft should be available at 15 minutes' notice from 7.30 am to 9 pm daily and military search and rescue helicopters should be available from 8 am to 10 pm daily. Outside these times the aircraft should be on 45 minutes' notice. In practice, the aircraft are usually airborne within a few minutes of being notified during the day and within about 30 minutes at night. Each aircraft has a minimum operational radius of 180 miles, which takes into account the 30 minutes that it could take to winch up the 20 or so people that might be on the scene, and the need to retain 30 minutes worth of fuel for landing. The helicopters travel at about 120 knots.

The criteria for search and rescue helicopters were reviewed this year by the UK search and rescue strategic committee working under the aegis of my Department and were implemented on 1 April. That review followed a National Audit Office report in 1998 on civil maritime search and rescue, which recommended that consideration should be given to rationalising helicopter coverage on the south coast before renewing the Solent and Portland contracts in 2003.

The United Kingdom search and rescue strategic committee recommended the criteria that I mentioned and that the helicopter organisation on the south coast should remain as it is for the time being. Ministers accepted those recommendations in the knowledge that a further review of helicopter coverage by the MCA and the Ministry of Defence is under way to harmonise arrangements between military and civil facilities. The project is at the pre-business plan stage, and it is expected that initial reports will be made to Ministers in spring next year.

Outside the 9 am to 9 pm time, the Portland area is primarily covered by the coastguard civil contract helicopter at Lee-on-the-Solent in Gosport near Portsmouth—you might know that place, Mr. Hancock. The area can also be covered by military helicopters from the Royal Naval air station at Culdrose or the Royal Air Force base at Chivenor. Operational analysis has shown that the daytime national criteria can still be met for the Portland area by the helicopter at Lee-on-the-Solent.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset said, the current Portland base is in the hands of the South West of England regional development agency. It is rightly the job of the agency to develop the Osprey site commercially and for the benefit of the local community.

Jim Knight: Before my hon. Friend gets going on that section of his speech, does he acknowledge that there might be merit in looking again at the national guidelines to differentiate between different types of incidents, as I described in my speech?

Mr. Jamieson: That matter will certainly be considered . At present, the coverage that would be available if the change went ahead would be within existing national criteria and would amount to the same coverage as many other parts of the coast have. If I may declare an interest, I think that that includes my own area of Plymouth.

While the site is being commercially developed, it is necessary for the South West of England RDA to move the helicopter hangar and realign the runway, which is required for the helicopter under Civil Aviation Authority rules. The realigned runway has been bunded by a wall more than three metres high to protect the commercial sites either side from flooding. In short, the runway has become a sacrificial flood plain. The proposed new location for the hangar is outside the runway area. The RDA has agreed to pay for the

[Mr. Jamieson]

preparation of the new location and to put a steel access door in the flood bunding to allow the helicopter access to and from the runway. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the enormous amount of work that he has put in, for resolving much of the detail with the RDA and for working with officials from the MCA. He has spent much of the past six months in discussion with them, and he has tirelessly pursued his case in meetings with me.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, the fundamental issue is funding for the new hangar. The estimated cost is between £2.5 million and £3.5 million. If the hangar had been rebuilt on its existing site, the cost, at today's prices, would have been about £1.5 million. That money was lost from the MCA's budget with the passing of time, and it does not have the required new funding in its budget plan. My hon. Friend has, therefore, made representations to me about central Government funding for the project, and I have listened long and hard to what he has said—not only today, but on other occasions.

It is a fact that the helicopter runway site is a sacrificial flood plain to allow commercial development of the site, and that the Portland operational area can be covered adequately from Lee-on-the-Solent within the national guidelines. We must not forget the view that was expressed by the National Audit Office in 1998.

Those points raise serious issues about the expenditure of taxpayers' money. There are already considerable pressures on the MCA's budget. It has continued to make efficiency savings and it has been bringing more ships on to the flag. It has also improved ways of working with the shipping industry. It has provided a much better service for about the same budgetary provision. The Department is also under pressure to provide funds, as is apparent from debates in the House and comments in the press and other places. Alas, those funds are not unlimited.

I understand the regional issues and the importance that is placed on the helicopter locally. I also understand the issues that were raised by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) about the Birmingham navy, because this issue does not affect only people on the coast. I accept his point about inward investment from the many waterborne activities that are pursued in the area—and from some of the further activities that have been proposed. I realise the importance of that, and how it might change the way in which this matter is considered. I shall need to balance the different arguments.

Jim Knight: It would be helpful if the Minister could clarify whether the MCA could sustain the ongoing revenue costs of maintaining a service at Portland. If it could do that, we are talking only about the capital cost. I know that that is a significant cost, but people in government often baulk at revenue costs and allow capital costs to be incurred.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend refers to two relevant issues: the extra capital cost of providing the new hangar on the site because of the type of development that has taken place under the South West of England regional development agency; and the ongoing extra revenue expenditure of maintaining it on that site, as well as of keeping the site going at Lee-on-the-Solent. We must consider the ongoing revenue costs, but the more important consideration for us at present is the extra capital cost that would be imposed on the MCA if the decision were taken to build the new hangar.

We will carefully consider the arguments that my hon. Friend has consistently made for quite some time—and those that have been made by other people in this House and outside—when we make recommendations to the Treasury about the funding for the new hangar. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of the current position, and I undertake to inform him of any decision at the earliest opportunity. His assiduous pursuit of this matter has led us to rethink. The decision would have been taken a long time ago had it not been for his efforts in constantly raising new issues—and some of them have been very good issues—and for the way that he has conducted the argument.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate, and I assure him that the points that he has raised on behalf of his constituents will be given serious and careful consideration before the final decision is taken.

Mr. Sanders: Will the Minister comment on the risk assessment?

Mr. Jamieson: The risk assessment is currently commercially in confidence, but we will find out what information can be provided, and if any of it is useful, I will pass it on to the hon. Gentleman.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 4 November 2002

WALES

Departmental Job Vacancies

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many job vacancies there were at *(a)* administrative assistant or equivalent, *(b)* administrative officer or equivalent, *(c)* administrative executive officer, *(d)* higher executive officer, *(e)* senior executive officer, *(f)* grade 7 principal and *(g)* all positions above grade 7 level in his Department for jobs located in *(i)* London and (ii) the south-east between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002; and what is the total employment for each civil service grade. [76558]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* My Department has offices in London and Cardiff. It is staffed entirely by secondees. The table shows the number of vacancies by grade as at 1 April 2001 against total employment for each grade in London.

Responsibility level	*Vacancies*	*Total Staff*
Grades 6 and above	—	2
Grade 7	—	4
Senior executive officer	—	1
Higher executive officer	1	9
Executive officer	—	9
Administrative officer	3	8
Administrative assistant	1	5
Total non-industrial staff	5	38

Political Appointments (Salaries)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the salary costs are of political appointments made by him in 2002–03; and what the figures were in each of the last three years. [77637]

Peter Hain: The Secretary of State for Wales is entitled to appoint two special advisers. Special advisers are paid on national salary scales which apply to all Government Departments. The basic scale currently ranges from £34,851 to £45,760.

TRANSPORT

Air Transport Consultation

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total cost was of the Department for Transport exhibition at the village of Church Lawford on 29 to 30 October regarding the Midlands New Site Option, contained in the National Consultation on the Future of Air Transport in the UK. [79473]

Mr. Jamieson: The approximate cost of the exhibition for the Midlands New Site Option is £82,000.

Biofuels Directive

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on how he intends to implement the EU Biofuel Directive. [72936]

Mr. Jamieson: Negotiations on the precise drafting of the Biofuels Directive are currently underway and the final form of the Directive has still to be agreed. Negotiations so far indicate it is likely that the key measure in the final version will be a requirement for member states to set indicative targets for 2005 and 2010 for the use of biofuels in transport. Transposition into UK law is likely to be via Regulations under the European Communities Act 1972.

Bus Services

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he is ensuring improvements in off-peak frequency of bus services. [79080]

Mr. Jamieson: Around 82 per cent. of bus services outside London are provided commercially and it is for the operators of those services to decide upon appropriate frequencies. Local authorities have powers to subsidise enhanced services outside peak hours.

For rural areas local authorities can use their allocations from the Government's Rural Bus Subsidy Grant (RBSG) to fund off-peak services. RBSG allocations total £47.5 million in 2002–03, rising to £48.5 million in 2003–04.

In London, where local transport is the responsibility of the Mayor, most routes now operate seven days a week and are sufficiently frequent throughout the day to allow passengers to use the network on a "turn-up-and-go" basis. Routes operating at low frequency are regularly reviewed to see whether higher frequencies are worthwhile.

Colne-Skipton Railway

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission an assessment of the feasibility of re-opening the Colne-Skipton railway. [79085]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport on 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1186W. The situation remains the same.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to amend the Road User Charging (Enforcement and Adjudication) (London) Regulations 2001, pursuant to the Government undertaking to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments of 19 October 2001. [78906]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the recent consultation, I anticipate that the amendment regulations will be made shortly, in time for implementation of the central London congestion charging scheme in February 2003.

Disused Railway Track Beds

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent advice he has given to the *(a)* SRA and *(b)* planning authorities concerning the safeguarding of disused railway track beds. [79086]

Mr. Jamieson: The Directions and Guidance the Secretary of State has issued to the Strategic Rail Authority require the Authority, when considering the disposal of land (including disused trackbeds), to have regard to the sites' transport potential and to avoid taking a short-term view. The Authority should look to the rail industry and local authorities to acquire sites with rail potential, but if these bodies do not purchase sites the Authority should consider whether they should be retained for rail use at a later date. The "Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: Transport", issued to Local Planning Authorities, states that local authorities should identify, and protect sites and routes, both existing and potential, which could be critical in developing infrastructure for the movement of freight.

Firefighters' Strike

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what preparations he has made to ensure the safety and continuity of service to the public in the event of a firefighters' strike. [77671]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr Raynsford) on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 527W.

Frethun Rail Freight Yard

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the nature and extent of the financial contribution by the Strategic Rail Authority to the package of measures to increase security at the Fréthun Rail freight yard; and if he will make a statement. [78907]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has undertaken to contribute around half of the £7.5 million cost of fixed security installations at the Fréthun freight yard, by means of a freight facilities grant. The contribution is subject to the provision of project and budgetary information (which has now been received), confirmation of completion of works and an independent verification of the works by UK security experts.

Grassington (Rail Services)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will request the SRA to conduct a feasibility study into extending the railway from the quarry outside Grassington into the town itself. [79083]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan outlines its proposals for future projects and their priorities. The Authority will update the plan annually.

Home Zones Scheme

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department has made available through the Home Zones Scheme Capital Modernisation Fund since 2000; and how much has been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* spent in rural areas in *(i)* 2000–01, (ii) 2001–02 and (iii) 2002–03 to date. [78399]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The Department has made £30 million available through the Capital Modernisation Fund for Home Zones Challenge projects. The funding covers a three year period from 2002–03. Successful projects were announced on 11 January 2002. The Home Zones Challenge is specifically aimed at improving the design of streets in residential locations. There were no applications from rural areas.

Invalid Carriages

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend his code of practice for class 3 vehicle users to include advice on the safe off-road storage of invalid carriages. [78619]

Mr. Jamieson: We are not aware of problems relating to safe off road storage of these vehicles but we would be happy to consider drawing up appropriate advice once we have information about the issue.

Loading Gauges

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which lines on the rail network have *(a)* W6a, *(b)* W6a-Pb and *(c)* Sb 1c loading gauge under Railtrack Group Standards; and if he will place copies of maps showing these lines in the Library. [78814]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that the information requested and a map of the gauge classification of routes on the national network are available from the Route Directory section of the Railtrack Freight Commercial Website at http://www.railtrack.co.uk/industry—partners/freight/index.cfm. The information is also available as a small scale map in Railtrack's 2002 Network Management Statement.

Local Transport Plans

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many planning authorities have included *(a)* new and *(b)* re-opened railways in their local transport plans in the last two years. [79088]

Mr. Jamieson: Full information is not readily available in the form requested. However, in the five-year Local Transport Plans (LTPs) submitted in July 2000, and subsequent Annual Progress Reports on these, 12 local transport authorities in England outside London have included proposals for 16 rail-related major local transport schemes. Proposals are not categorised by whether they contain new or re-opened railways. In addition, all LTPs contain strategies which take account of the contribution rail can make towards their objectives.

Motorways

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason the southbound carriageway of the M1 motorway was closed on 6 October; and who authorised the closure. [79134]

Mr. Spellar: On 6 October the southbound carriageway of the M1 in the area of Junction 21 had to be closed as a result of a fire in an outbuilding of a local farm, where gas cylinders containing potentially explosive gases were stored. Following consultation between Leicester County Fire Brigade and the Health and Safety Executive, a 200-metre exclusion zone was requested around the farm including a section of the motorway. Leicestershire police therefore closed the motorway until the risk of explosion had passed.

Public Transport (Disabled Access)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what obligations there are on public transport providers to provide access for passengers with disabilities. [79052]

Mr. Jamieson: Part V of the Disability Discrimination Act gives the Secretary of State powers to introduce regulations requiring public transport to be accessible to disabled people, including those who need to travel in a wheelchair. Under these regulations all new trains (including light rail and underground) which have come into service since January 1999 have been required to meet comprehensive accessibility standards. Similar regulations have applied since January 2000 to all new buses with a capacity of over 22 passengers used on local or scheduled service. Some requirements to help ambulant disabled people and those with visual impairment use coaches and smaller buses have also been introduced but full wheelchair access will not be required for these vehicles until January 2005 because of the technical and operational challenges that remain. Regulations, which came into force on 1 October this year, also place obligations on bus drivers and conductors to assist disabled passengers.

Transport infrastructure, including bus and railway stations is covered by Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act which has placed duties on service providers since October 1999 to amend policies or practices which discriminate against disabled people. From October 2004 these duties will extend to the removal of physical barriers to access.

Railway Track [illegible]tion (East Lancashire)

Mr. Go[illegible]rentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the state of the railway track in east Lancashire; and if he will make a statement. [79089]

Mr. Jamieson: This is primarily a matter for Network Rail.

Reopened Railway Costs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the estimated cost per week is of re-opening a closed railway where the trackbed is in good condition. [79084]

Mr. Jamieson: It is not possible to give a generalised figure. The cost would depend on location, planned usage, the condition of existing or provision of new infrastructure, and a host of other factors. A meaningful cost estimate could only be made on a case by case basis, and would be unlikely to be best expressed as a 'cost per week'.

Road Accidents

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Government oppose EU proposals to introduce a presumption of guilt on the part of the motorist in all cases of motorist/cyclist accidents. [79037]

Mr. Jamieson: Proposals for a fifth motor insurance directive are at an early stage. It is not clear that a presumption of guilt on the part of the motorist is intended. The proposal states that there is no intention to 'prejudice the civil liability of the pedestrian or cyclist or the level of award for damages in a specific accident, under national legislation'.

Road Networks

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the 2002 National Road Maintenance Condition Survey to include the cost of outstanding repairs on the *(a)* local and *(b)* strategic road networks. [78897]

Mr. Jamieson: The 2002 National Road Maintenance Condition Survey is being conducted on the same basis as in 2001 and previous years. Results will be published in April 2003.

Trust Port Boards

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport further to his answer of 29 October, Ref 78170, if he will list appointments he has made to trust port boards since January 2000 involving representatives of local authorities. [79155]

Mr. Jamieson: Five such appointments have been made since January 2000, three to the Shoreham Port Authority, and two to the Milford Haven Port Authority as detailed in the following table.

Port authority	*Appointed*
Shoreham	
Councillor Bob Carden	January 2002
Councillor Pat Hawkes	January 2002
Councillor Neil Parkin	January 2002
Milford Haven	
Councillor Eric Harries	February 2000
Councillor John Allen-Mirehouse	April 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Leominster of 13 September, regarding the River Lugg Internal Drainage Board. [78603]

Mr. Morley: I regret that the Department has no record of receiving this correspondence.

Dog Licensing Scheme

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce a dog licensing scheme for owners; and if she will make a statement. [76954]

Alun Michael: This Government have considered the options for introducing a dog licensing scheme for owners very carefully. However, at present the Government are not planning to introduce a dog licensing scheme for dog owners. Defra does promote responsible dog ownership through byelaws, education and publicity.

Farm Mapping

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the level of accuracy is of the digital mapping of farms across the UK. [78745]

Alun Michael: The underlying digital mapping used for the digitisation of the IACS registered fields is the Ordnance Survey's latest digital product known as MasterMap. The accuracy levels are at least as good as those for the National Grid series previously used and the product is available from the Ordnance Survey.

Fish Stocks

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what analysis her Department has made of the share of Community fish stocks, by species, that fall under UK *(a)* 12 and *(b)* 200 mile/median line limits. [77252]

Mr. Morley: No such analysis has been carried out since for the most part the stock assessments are carried out by international scientists, not in relation to national waters, but by total ICES area. In any case, almost all of the main stocks fished in UK waters spend time also in the waters of other countries.

Fisheries

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role she proposes for English regional assemblies in the governance of fisheries out to 12 nautical miles from the baseline. [77644]

Mr. Morley: None. The powers and functions of elected regional assemblies are fully set out in the regional governance White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511). These proposals have no implications for the governance of fisheries either within or outside 12 nautical miles from the baseline.

Flood and Coastal Defence

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the local authorities who *(a)* have and *(b)* have not produced a policy statement under High Level Targets for flood and coastal defence. [77618]

Mr. Morley: Defra and the Environment Agency have received policy statements from 219 of the 354 local authorities expected to produce them. We have received 12 statements since the report on High Level Target 1 was compiled in April 2002; however there are still 135 outstanding statements.

The following local authorities have produced policy statements:

Adur District Council
Allerdale Borough Council
Alnwick District Council
Amber Valley Borough Council
Arun District Council
Ashford Borough Council
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council
Bassetlaw District Council
Bedford Borough Council
Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council
Bexley London Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Blackpool Borough Council
Blyth Valley Borough Council
Bolsover District Council
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Bournemouth Borough Council
Braintree District Council
Bristol City Council
Bromley London Borough Council
Broxtowe Borough Council
Burnley Borough Council
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Camden London Borough Council
Canterbury City Council
Caradon District Council
Carlisle City Council
Castle Morpeth Borough Council
Charnwood Borough Council
Cheltenham Borough Council
Cherwell District Council
Chester City Council
Chesterfield Borough Council
Chichester District Council
Chorley Borough Council
Christchurch Borough Council
Congleton Borough Council
Copeland Borough Council
Cotswold District Council
Coventry City Council
Darlington Borough Council
Daventry District Council
Derby City Council
Derwentside District Council
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
Dover District Council
Durham City Council
Easington District Council
East Devon District Council
East Dorset District Council
East Hampshire District Council
East Northamptonshire District Council
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
East Staffordshire Borough Council
Eastbourne Borough Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
Eden District Council
Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough
Council
Elmbridge Borough Council
Enfield London Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Erewash Borough Council
Exeter City Council
Fareham Borough Council
Fylde Borough Council
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Counci
Gedling Borough Council
Gloucester City Council
Gosport Borough Council
Gravesham Borough Council
Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Halton Borough Council
Hambleton District Council
Harrogate Borough Council
Harrow London Borough Council
Hart District Council
Hartlepool Borough Council
Hastings Borough Council
Havant Borough Council
Hertsmere Borough Council
Horsham District Council
Hounslow London Borough Council
Huntingdonshire District Council
Hyndburn Borough Council
Ipswich Borough Council
Isle of Wight Council
Isles of Scilly Council
Kennet District Council
Kerrier District Council
Kingston upon Hull City Council
Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Leeds City Council
Lichfield District Council
Luton Borough Council
Manchester City Council
Medway Council
Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Mid Sussex District Council
Mole Valley District Council
Newark & Sherwood District Council
North Cornwall District Council
North Dorset District Council
North East Lincolnshire Council
North Norfolk District Council
North Somerset Council
Council
Northampton Borough Council
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Pendle Borough Council
Poole Borough Council
Preston Borough Council
Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
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Rotherham Borough Council
Runnymede Borough Council
Ryedale District Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Sheffield City Council
Durham City Council
East Devon District Council
East Hampshire District Council
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Eastbourne Borough Council
Eden District Council
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Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
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Gedling Borough Council
Gosport Borough Council
Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Hambleton District Council
Harrow London Borough Council
Hartlepool Borough Council
Havant Borough Council
Horsham District Council
Hounslow London Borough Council
Hyndburn Borough Council
Isle of Wight Council
Kennet District Council
Kingston upon Hull City Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Leeds City Council
Lichfield District Council
Luton Borough Council
Manchester City Council
Medway Council
Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Mid Sussex District Council
Mole Valley District Council
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Ipswich Borough Council
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Stroud District Council
Sunderland City Council
Sutton London Borough Council

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Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Tynedale District Council
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Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Wansbeck District Council
Warrington Council
Warwick District Council
Waveney District Council
Waverley Borough Council
Wealden District Council
Wear Valley District Council
Wellingborough District Council
Welwyn Hatfield District Council
West Devon Borough Council
West Dorset District Council
West Lancashire District Council
West Oxfordshire District Council
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
Winchester City Council
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Woking Borough Council
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Worthing Borough Council
Wychavon District Council
Wycombe District Council
Wyre Borough Council
York City Council

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Bradford City Council
Breckland Council
Brent London Borough Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Bridgnorth District Council
Brighton and Hove Council
Broadland District Council
Bromsgrove District Council
Broxbourne Borough Council
Cambridge City Council
Cannock Chase District Council
Carrick District Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Chester-le-Street District Council
Chiltern District Council
City of London
Colchester Borough Council
Corby Borough Council
Craven District Council
Crawley Borough Council
Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council
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East Hertfordshire District Council
Fenland District Council
Forest of Dean District Council
Guildford Borough Council
Hammersmith and Fulham London
Harborough District Council
Harlow District Council
Herefordshire Council
Hillingdon London Borough Council
Islington London Borough Council
Kettering Borough Council
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Lambeth London Borough Council
Lewisham London Borough Council
Maidstone Borough Council
Malvern Hills District Council
Merton London Borough Council
Milton Keynes Council
Newham London Borough Council
North Kesteven District Council
Council
Norwich City Council
Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
Penwith District Council
Reading Borough Council
Richmond upon Thames London
Rochford District Council
Salisbury District Council
Sedgemoor District Council
Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
South Bucks District Council
South Hams District Council
South Kesteven District Council
South Norfolk District Council
South Shropshire District Council
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
St Albans District Council
Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Teesdale District Council
Three Rivers District Council
Tower Hamlets London Borough Council
Uttlesford District Council
Wakefield City Council
Council
Watford Borough Council
East Lindsey District Council
Forest Heath District Council
Greenwich London Borough Council
Hackney London Borough Council
Borough Council
Haringey London Borough Council
Havering London Borough Council
High Peak Borough Council
Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council
Kensington and Chelsea Royal Borough
King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough
Kingston upon Thames Royal Borough
Leicester City Council
Lincoln City Council
Maldon District Council
Mendip District Council
Mid Devon District Council
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
North Hertfordshire District Council
North West Leicestershire District
North Wiltshire District Council
Nottingham City Council
Oxford City Council
Plymouth City Council
Redbridge London Borough Council
Borough Council
Rushmoor Borough Council
Sedgefield Borough Council
Selby District Council
Slough Borough Council
South Bedfordshire District Council
South Derbyshire District Council
South Holland District Council
South Lakeland District Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
South Somerset District Council
Spelthorne Borough Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Swindon Borough Council
Telford and Wrekin Council
Thurrock Borough Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Vale Royal Borough Council
Waltham Forest London Borough
Wandsworth London Borough Council
West Berkshire Council

West Lindsey District Council
West Wiltshire District Council
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council
Wokingham Council
West Somerset District Council
Westminster City Council
Windsor & Maidenhead Royal Borough
Wyre Forest District Council

Foot and Mouth

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library the documentation and advice given in respect of tax treatment of grants given under the Foot and Mouth Recovery Fund. [77539]

Alun Michael: It is for the Inland Revenue and local tax offices to advise on the tax treatment of income, including Business Recovery Fund grants.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to require the computers at the RPA and the BCMS to be made compatible; and if she will make a statement. [79318]

Alun Michael: The new computer system being developed for bovine schemes under the RPA Change Programme will provide interfaces to current systems such as the BCMS database.

A major investment in IT improvements is also being made at the BCMS. The system will be moved onto a more secure platform and a facility will be developed to provide for the issue of "statements" to producers showing details of the animals recorded on their holdings.

Public Paths

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many roads used as public paths have yet to have their usage reviewed by the relevant surveying authority in accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. [79380]

Alun Michael: A highway authority survey carried out in 1999 found that 4,166 roads used as a public path have been reclassified in accordance with section 54 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, with 3,305 still to be reviewed.

Recruitment (Over-50s)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of new recruits to her Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79312]

Alun Michael: Information is available from the date of the creation of the new Department (Defra) on 9 June 2001.

The percentage of new recruits to core-Defra, between 9 June 2001 and 31
March 2002, who were aged 50 or over, is 7.2 per cent.

Religious Slaughter

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to improve the welfare of animals slaughtered by religious methods; and if she will make a statement. [78466]

Mr. Morley: There are already detailed requirements governing the religious slaughter of animals and birds laid down in Schedule 12 of the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (as amended). Although we are currently in the process of making some further amendments to the regulations, none of these changes are to Schedule 12. However we are in the process of producing draft Codes of Practice on the slaughter of animals and poultry, including religious slaughter, with the aim of improving the welfare of animals and birds at slaughter. In addition, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (the Government's advisory body on farmed animal welfare matters) is currently preparing a report on the welfare of farmed livestock (red meat animals) at slaughter, including livestock slaughtered by religious methods.

Research and Development

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department and its predecessors on research and development in each of the last 15 years broken down by category. [78591]

Alun Michael: Breaking down the figure spent on research and development programmes, by category, for DEFRA, former MAFF, DETR and DOE for each of the last 15 years could be achieved only at disproportionate cost. A full picture of the current DEFRA research programme, including details of all projects, can be found on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/research.

Sea Angling

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those who have expressed interest in her proposal for research into the economic contribution of sea angling. [77263]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* Defra holds in confidence details of the institutions expressing an interest because the information is commercially sensitive and its disclosure might create difficulties for the remainder of the tender exercise. It would therefore be inappropriate to give details of the institutions. The identity of the researcher who is selected will be made public once the contract has been let.

Third Countries Fisheries Agreements

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those third countries with which the EU has concluded mutual fisheries agreements; and how much Community money has been granted to each state. [77250]

Mr. Morley: There are currently 20 fisheries agreements in force between the European Community and third countries. These can be classified into three main types:

Reciprocal-where community fishermen obtain rights to fish in the waters of a third country and in return fishermen from the third country have rights to fish in EU waters;

Classical-where the European Union pays for access for EU vessels to fish in the waters of a third country and where skippers pay for licences and in some cases for the amount of fish caught; and

Mixed-a mixture of both the reciprocal and classical.

The table shows the third countries with which the EU has fisheries agreements, the type of agreement and the sum paid by the EU where applicable.

euro

Third Country Agreements		
Country	*Agreement type*	*Annual cost 2002*
Angola	classical	15,500,000
Cape Verde	classical	680,000
Comores	classical	350,250
Faroe	reciprocal	—
Gabon	classical	1,262,500
Greenland	mixed	42,820,000
Guinea Bissau	classical	10,000,000
Republic of Guinea	classical	2,960,000
Iceland	reciprocal	—
Ivory Coast	classical	957,500
Lithuania	mixed	—
Madagascar	classical	825,000
Mauritania	classical	86,000,000
Mauritius	classical	825,000
Norway	reciprocal	—
Poland	reciprocal	—
Russia	reciprocal	—
Sao Tomé e Principe	classical	925,000
Senegal	classical	16,000,000
Seychelles	classical	3,480,000

Vital Villages Initiative

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the budget is for 2002–03 of the vital villages initiative; and what the future projections for this figure are. [79062]

Alun Michael: The budget for vital villages for 2002–03 is £10.41million, which is split as follows:

Parish plans: £1.35 million

Community service grants: £4.82 million

Parish transport grants: £4.24 million

Future projections will emerge from the current corporate planning process following the outcome of the 2002 Spending Review.

Water (Unpowered Craft Access)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further progress she has made on increasing access to water for non-powered craft; and if she will make a statement. [79076]

Alun Michael: Our research report, Water-Based Sport and Recreation: the facts was published in December 2001. This is a wide-ranging report which touches on the responsibilities of several Government Departments and agencies and we have been working with them in deciding how best to take this forward.

While none of the issues are new or straightforward to resolve, I am committed to finding solutions wherever possible.

As a first step I have asked the Countryside Agency (in partnership with other agencies) to pilot some demonstration projects to develop best practice for access agreements on key stretches of water.

Water Framework Directive

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how she will ensure that transposition of the Water Framework Directive in England and Wales will contribute to the mitigation of floods and droughts. [76384]

Mr. Morley: The Directive is concerned with achieving water quality objectives (article 4). While it does not set objectives for flood and drought mitigation, the overall effect of the actions to protect and improve water quality required by the Directive will contribute to mitigating the effects of floods and droughts (article 1*(e)*).

Draft regulations to transpose the Directive, including articles 1 and 4 will be included in a consultation paper to be published next year.

In addition, my Department will be working closely with the Environment Agency and others to ensure appropriate links are made between river basin management and flood risk management planning.

Water Policy

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when she will be publishing the water policy document for England. [79448]

Mr. Morley: The document entitled "Directing the Flow—priorities for future water policy" will be published on 5 November. It is intended to be a high-level policy document and strengthens the integration of water policy with other policy areas. The document takes the first steps towards setting out our strategic aims and summarising our proposed future priorities and direction for the water environment, water resources and water management. It aims to take a long-term view, looking at the next 20 years and beyond and setting the context within which specific actions will need to be taken. Copies of the document will be deposited in the House Libraries and will also be available on DEFRA's internet site (www.defra.gov.uk/environment/water/index.htm).

CABINET OFFICE

Digital Television

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office for what reason UK online interactive is *(a)* being solely provided on British Sky Broadcasting digital television and *(b)* not being provided on BBC digital television. [77884]

Mr. Alexander: It is our continued intention to make UK online interactive available on all available digital television platforms where technically possible. We are working to do this.

The BBC operates two of the six UK digital television multiplexes but were unable to make these available to UK online interactive due to the lack of capacity. We are actively exploring the opportunity to use one of the remaining multiplexes not controlled by the BBC.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Weir: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what discussions he has had with eight coastal local authorities along the possible route of ships carrying nuclear waste from Japan to Sellafield on the subject of emergency planning. [68091]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I understand there are no plans for the shipment of nuclear waste from Japan to Sellafield at this time. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency discuss emergency planning with coastal local authorities on a general basis and not related to specific shipments.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what discussions he has had with the *(a)* Government of the Republic of Ireland, *(b)* National Assembly for Wales, *(c)* Northern Irish Assembly and *(d)* Scottish Executive on the subject of emergency planning in respect of ships carrying nuclear waste to Sellafield. [68092]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I have had no discussions with any of the bodies mentioned, however the Maritime and Coastguard Agency have been in discussions with officials from the Government of the Republic of Ireland on a more general emergency response basis.

UK Online Interactive Project

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the consequences for phase one of the UK online interactive project were of the end of ITV interactive's involvement. [77885]

Mr. Alexander: ITV Digital closed its interactive services on 1 May 2002. From that point onwards some 225,000 previous ITV Active subscribers were not able to access UK online interactive using ITV digital equipment. The UK online interactive service continued to be available to about 7 million users of Sky digital receivers.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Benefit Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1349W, if she will, for each pilot and pathfinder initiative listed, give the criteria for the selection of the local authorities benefiting; whether all local authorities were invited to apply; by what criteria invitations to apply were allocated; where local authorities were invited to apply; which did so; and whether elements of local authority matched funding were required. [76177]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Child Deprivation (Funding)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the maximum extra funding is that a child can receive under the ethnicity and other factors. [78611]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The existing Education Standard Spending Assessment does not identify children with additional educational needs, so it is not possible to give the maximum funding that an LEA receives for a child through ethnicity and other factors. Under the proposals issued for consultation on 8 July, the number of children with additional educational needs due to poverty and ethnicity or language needs is estimated for each authority, which receives a top-up for each such child, either for poverty or for ethnicity or language needs, but not for both. Decisions on the top-ups, and their level, will be announced by the beginning of December.

Connexions

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much has been spent to date by the Connexions service on *(a)* literature design, *(b)* printing of literature and *(c)* consultancy fees related to the production of literature for each region in which it operates. [77352]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The amounts spent by Connexions Partnerships on literature (which is interpreted here as promotional material) vary according to the length of time partnerships have been operational. (The first phase of partnerships went live in April 2001 and the most recent in October 2002.) The table presents regional data on partnerships' cumulative expenditure from the date they went live. It has not been possible in all cases to disaggregate figures for design, printing and consultancy as some partnerships group these together and/or contract with one provider to supply all three services (these appear as "merged costs" in the table).

Connexions partnership spend to date on literature by region

£ Region	Total spend	Design	Print	Consultancy	Merged costs
North West	390,612	—	—	—	390,612
West Midlands	341,588	12,930	50,855	7,453	270,350
London	251,321	32,205	90,341	25,375	103,400
Yorkshire and Humber	154,002	29,669	39,383	15,242	69,708
South West	144,674	16,390	78,650	—	49,634
South East	69,093	3,750	7,960	—	57,383
East	61,695	8,189	25,756	1,750	26,000
East Midlands	34,069	—	—	—	34,069
North East	47,361	—	—	—	47,361

Construction Industry

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his latest estimate is of the number of vacancies in the construction industry in each region of the country. [78480]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr Charles Hendry, dated 4 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question concerning the latest estimate of the number of vacancies in the construction industry in each region of the country (78480).

The only comprehensive information about current job vacancies analysed by industry is the new monthly enterprise-based ONS Vacancy Survey, which at this stage is being published on an experimental basis. According to this survey there were 21,400 job vacancies in the construction industry on average for the period July to September 2002 for the United Kingdom as a whole. The design of the sample survey means it is not presently possible to provide regional analysis of vacancies on a reliable basis.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he intends to reply in full to the letter to his predecessor dated 22 August 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Geoffrey Walker. [78344]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A reply was issued on 12 September.

Education Funding

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment his Department has made of Option 5 in the review of the level of funding for education. [78842]

Mr. Miliband: I refer my hon Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on 24 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 399.

Education SSA

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many of the authorities that have more than 10 per cent. of children in their schools, whose mother tongue is believed not to be English, spent below their education SSA in the last year for which figures are available. [78612]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows, for those authorities where there are more than 10 per cent. of pupils in primary and secondary schools whose mother tongue is known or believed not to be English, the difference between budgeted spend and Education Standard Spending Assessment, for 2002–03. Of the 49 LEAs in this category, 33 budgeted to spend above Education SSA for 2002–03.

£ million

	SSA	Spend	Difference
Barking and Dagenham	102.9	103.2	0.3
Barnet	161.9	164.1	2.1
Birmingham	578.5	605.5	27.1
Blackburn	79.2	81.5	2.3
Bolton	134.8	135.0	0.3
Bradford	267.3	259.1	(8.2)
Brent	144.5	135.5	(9.0)
Camden	103.0	106.8	3.7
City of London	1.0	2.3	1.3
Coventry	155.5	161.9	6.4
Croydon	169.2	170.5	1.2
Derby	112.7	112.5	(0.3)
Ealing	152.7	154.4	1.7
Enfield	170.02	168.2	(2.0)
Greenwich	145.0	141.8	(3.2)
Hackney	120.7	112.7	(8.0)
Hammersmith and Fulham	77.0	77.0	0.1
Haringey	134.3	134.3	0.0
Harrow	95.8	97.3	1.4
Hillingdon	134.1	132.4	(1.7)
Hounslow	126.4	124.9	(1.5)
Islington	104.5	104.7	0.2
Kensington and Chelsea	48.7	50.1	1.4
Kingston-upon-Thames	64.9	67.0	2.1
Kirklees	188.7	186.9	(1.7)
Lambeth	130.9	131.2	0.3
Leicester	150.8	151.5	0.7
Lewisham	147.1	147.8	0.7
Luton	102.8	103.0	0.2
Manchester	232.5	231.7	(0.8)
Merton	74.8	75.6	0.7
Newham	190.2	183.2	(7.0)
Nottingham City	128.7	132.7	4.0
Oldham	122.3	123.8	1.6
Peterborough	92.6	91.4	(1.2)
Reading	55.0	56.0	1.0
Redbridge	144.7	142.2	(2.5)
Richmond-upon-Thames	60.7	65.0	4.4
Rochdale	111.1	109.6	(1.6)
Sandwell	152.6	154.6	2.0
Slough	70.2	68.3	(1.9)
Southwark	149.8	149.8	0.0

£ million

	SSA	Spend	Difference
Tower Hamlets	167.8	170.0	2.1
Walsall	143.1	144.0	0.9
Waltham Forest	131.5	133.5	2.0
Wandsworth	112.2	108.8	(3.4)
Westminster	79.7	87.0	7.3
Windsor and Maidenhead	61.1	61.5	0.4
Wolverhampton	128.1	129.9	1.7

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the SSA per head is in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Staffordshire. [78843]

Mr. Miliband: In 2002–03 Staffordshire's Education SSA per primary pupil (aged 5–10) is £2,450 and per secondary pupil (aged 11–15) is £3,140.

Note:

Figures in cash terms rounded to the nearest £10

Ethnicity

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what factors other than language are measured in the ethnicity factor; and what proportion of the ethnicity factor is based on additional language criteria. [78610]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The ethnicity factor in the existing Education Standard Spending Assessment is measured by country of birth data taken from the 1991 national census. Under the proposals issued for consultation on 8 July, two factors are proposed for ethnicity, both taken from the Annual Schools' Census: the first relates to the number of children with language needs; the second relates to the numbers of children in certain low achieving ethnic groups. Decisions on the proportion of funding to be distributed using each factor will be announced by the beginning of December.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what money is planned to pass between the Department and *(a)* the European Social Fund and *(b)* the European Regional Development Fund in *(i)* 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [79072]

Margaret Hodge: Overall £502 million of ESF is available in England in 2002–03 and £512 million in 2003–04. The figures for ERDF are £421 million in 2002–03 and £532 million in 2003–04. A significant proportion of ESF and a small proportion of ERDF support the Department for Education and Skills' policy objectives in the English regions. In addition, the Department plans to use £11 million of ESF in 2002–03 and £30 million in 2003–04 to support the development of its national policies and programmes.

Examinations

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the initial total cost was including production, printing, marking and moderation of *(a)* KS1 SATS, *(b)* KS2 SATS, *(c)* KS3 SATS, *(d)* GCSE, *(e)* AS, *(f)* A Level and *(g)* A2 for all schools in England and Wales for each of the years from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [76582]

Mr. Miliband: The breakdown of expenditure for the KS SATS (England) and GCSE and A Level (England and Wales is as follows:

£ million

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
KS1 SATS	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.9	2.2
KS2 SATS	3.1	10.5	10.6	11.4	12.2
KS3 SATS	3.5	10.5	11.0	11.9	13.0
KS SATS 1–3 total	8.2	22.6	23.3	25.2	27.4
GCSE	86.0	92.7	95.8	102.0	108.9
A Level	36.4	42.4	44.4	59.5	64.6

Notes:

1. Because of budgeting methods, the individual KS1–3 SATS figures are an indicative breakdown of the KS SATs subtotals.
2. Figures for KS SATS for 1997–98 are from 1 October 1997 (when QCA commenced operations).
3. Figures for A Level include AS and A2.
4. Figures for GCSE and A-Level for 2001–02 are estimates.

F40 Group

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions he has had with the F40 group in the review of local government education funding formula to provide a more even funding system for rural and inner city schools. [78877]

Mr. Miliband: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on 24 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 460W.

Free School Milk

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures he is taking to promote free milk in schools for children aged up to 11; and if he will list education authorities in the UK which provide free school milk for those aged up to *(a)* seven and *(b)* 11 years. [79224]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: *The* Department supports the provision of free and paid for milk in schools and encourages schools and LEAs to offer it to pupils. Following a 20 percent reduction of the EU subsidy on school milk from January 2001, this Department jointly agreed with the Department of Health and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to top up the 1.5m shortfall. This helped to prevent possible increased costs of school milk provision. This Department does not collect statistics on school milk provision.

Funding Gap

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of funding is distributed under the AEN for *(a)* deprivation, *(b)* ethnicity and *(c)* area cost adjustment; what criteria are used to access the need for increased funding for ethnicity in secondary and primary schools; and what plans she has to reduce the funding gap between schools. [76274]

Mr. Miliband: Under the current system of education standard spending assessments, 19 per cent. of funding is distributed according to additional educational needs, of which 17 per cent. is for deprivation and 2 per cent. is related to ethnicity (as measured by country of birth data taken from the 1991 national census). A further 4 per cent. is distributed through the area cost adjustment. The level of extra funding for ethnicity in the current system is determined by analysis of the spending patterns of local authorities from 1990–91. In the new system of education funding assessments, which will be introduced for 2003–04, the level of extra funding for additional educational needs will be decided on the basis of evidence about pupil characteristics and cost of provision. This will determine the distribution of funding between authorities and will be announced with the local authority finance settlement by early December.

Higher Education

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will consult students on the findings of the review of higher education; [77753]

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Government will consult students on the outcome of the review of higher education. [77778]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* We plan to publish a strategy document setting out our 10-year vision for the development and reform of higher education in January. Once the document is published there will be opportunity for all interested parties to respond.

Higher Education (Lecturers' Pay)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he expects to achieve the equalisation of pay between further education college and sixth form college lecturers. [78476]

Margaret Hodge: Colleges in the further education (FE) sector, including sixth form colleges, are independent corporations with their own pay arrangements. Colleges agree annual pay rises and conditions of employment with their staff in the context of local priorities and the overall resources available to them. There is a nationally recommended pay increase agreed by the employers' representative bodies and the unions but pay arrangements in the sector are diverse, reflecting colleges' local flexibility. Government have no plans to change this arrangement.

Extra resources have been made available to the FE sector. This year, £4.4 billion has been allocated to FE, an increase of £1.2 billion in five years. Within this, there is £142 million available for the Teaching Pay Initiative, known as the Professional Standards Payment in sixth form colleges, which helps colleges to modernise pay arrangements and to recruit, reward and retain excellent teachers.

We have already announced that from next year and up to 2005–06 there will be a 1 per cent. annual real terms increase in core funding for FE and three year budgets for colleges which demonstrate their effectiveness. This, plus the additional resources for FE that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be announcing in November to support our Success for All strategy, will present a more stable environment within which general FE and sixth form colleges can plan and negotiate pay levels and arrangements.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what grants his Department plans to make to NGOs in 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [79078]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This Department works with over a 1000 voluntary and private organisations to which grants are made directly. Many more organisations receive grants via our NDPBs and other agencies, for which we hold no central records. Therefore this question could only be answered at disproportionate cost.

School Exclusions

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils were permanently excluded from school in each local education authority in each of the last five years. [78475]

Mr. Miliband: A table showing the information requested has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

School Repairs

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to *(a)* publish annual reports on his Department's targets for the rebuilding and repair of school infrastructure and *(b)* instruct his Department's Service Delivery Agreement to include fresh targets for *(i)* the number of schools to be rebuilt and remodelled, *(ii)* the number of schools to be in receipt of substantial repair and *(iii)* the elimination of the repair backlog by 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [78894]

Mr. Miliband: We have no immediate plans to publish annual reports on the rebuilding and repair of school infrastructures. The Department is currently reviewing its schools capital programme in the light of the outcome of the recent spending review.

School Tranpsort

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to provide free school bus services for secondary school students in Staffordshire living less than three miles from their schools. [78458]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Staffordshire county council's bid under the Rural Bus Challenge will be assessed over the next two months by officials in the Department for Transport. They aim to announce the successful schemes early in the new year.

Schools Finance (Essex)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in Essex suffered a cash budget cut in this financial year. [78478]

Mr. Miliband: In Essex local education authority 86 schools had a fall in their cash budget share in 2002–03, but of these only three also had a fall in their cash budget share per pupil. Changes in pupil numbers are the principal reason for changes in budget share from year to year. 493 schools had a rise in their cash budget share, but of these 20 had a fall in their cash budget share per pupil: this was largely in cases where rising rolls led to a lessening of the factor which protects the smallest primary schools.

The information is taken from data published in the LEAs section 52 budget statements for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Special Educational Needs

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what powers he has to make provision for the assessment of special educational needs of children living in accommodation centres. [77803]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Clause 28(1)*(f)* of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill provides Government with the power to provide education in an accommodation centre. Clause 35(7) states that the education provider shall make appropriate facilities available for a child with special educational needs unless it is incompatible with the special educational provision his learning difficulty calls for; the provision of efficient education for other children resident in the centre; or the efficient use of resources. Clause 35(9)*(b)* empowers the education provider to ask the LEA to conduct a statutory assessment of a child's SEN, under section 329A of the Education Act 1996.

An LEA's duties under Part IV of the Education Act 1996 to assess, and where necessary, to make provision for children in their area who are of compulsory school age and have special educational needs, will apply to children residing in accommodation centres as such children will be in the area of a LEA for the purposes of this part of the 1996 Act.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many specialist schools were designated before 1 September 1997; how many such schools and what percentage of the whole were *(a)* city technology colleges and *(b)* grant maintained schools; and what the average percentage was of children in receipt of free school meals in *(i)* specialist schools designated prior to 1 September 1997 and (ii) city technology colleges and grant maintained schools designated as specialist schools before 1 September 1997. [77012]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is as follows:

181 specialist schools were designated before 1 September 1997.

(a) None of these are city technology colleges (CTCs).

(b) 98 of these are grant maintained secondary schools, which is 54 per cent. of the total.

Free school meal (FSM) eligibility as at January 2002.

(a) 13 per cent of pupils attending the 181 specialist schools designated before 1 September 1997 were eligible to receive a free school meal.

(b) No CTCs are specialist schools, and therefore, are not applicable. 11 per cent. of pupils attending the 98 grant maintained secondary schools were eligible to receive a free school meal.

Standards Fund

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what amounts per pupil his Department paid to English local education authorities out of the standards fund in 2001–02; [78456]

(2) what the *(a)* average amounts paid to English local authorities and *(b)* actual amounts paid to Staffordshire local education authority per pupil were in respect of *(i)* educational standard spending, (ii) standards fund and (iii) other special and specific grants in each of the last three years. [78457]

Mr. Miliband: The figures showing the amounts allocated to English local education authorities in 2000–01, 2001–02 and 2002–03 to date have been placed in the Library. Education standard spending is an assessment of need rather than grant. Decisions on the new assessment formula for education will be announced in early December. Other special and specific grants include recurrent grants relating to pupils aged 4–19, and exclude grants for children aged below four years and education maintenance allowances.

Student Loans

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans he has to increase the interest rate on student loans; and if he will make a statement. [78778]

(2) what plans he has to change the threshold over which graduates are required to repay student loans; and if will make a statement. [78780]

(3) when he intends to publish his Department's review of post-16 student support. [78781]

Margaret Hodge: We intend to publish a strategy document setting out our vision for the development and reform of higher education, including the outcome of the student support review, in January. We will set out our policies on student loans and post 16 student support in that document.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has

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had with the US Government about the delivery of aid to Afghanistan; and if she will make a statement. [76953]

Clare Short: During a recent visit to Washington and a return visit to London I met the head of USAID Andrew Natsios, during which we discussed the situation in Afghanistan. We noted that considerable progress had been made and an estimated $1.3 billion of $1.8 billion pledged at Tokyo for Afghanistan had now been disbursed. However, much remains to be done. I also met with General McNeill in Afghanistan last week to discuss humanitarian and security issues. We will continue to work with UN and bilateral agencies to try to ensure that Afghanistan's humanitarian needs are properly resourced.

I have also recently agreed to contribute towards clearance of Afghanistan's outstanding arrears to the Asia Development Bank and World Bank in order that more finance can be made available for the reconstruction effort.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with ministers from other governments who promised aid to Afganistan and are yet to deliver it; and if she will make a statement. [76952]

Clare Short: All the major doners were represented at an Afghanistan Implementation Group meeting held in Kabul in mid October. This meeting revealed that delivery of pledges was now less of a problem than had previously been the case, with the overall picture looking good: of the $1.8 billion pledged at Tokoyo for 2002, it is estimated that up to $1.3 billion has been disbursed. The key issue as set out by the Afghans at the IG is now that future support is channelled in the most effective way in accordance with Afghanistan's budget priorities.

Agricultural Commodities

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if it is her policy to support *(a)* co-operation between coffee producing governments to stop more beans entering the market than can be sold and *(b)* the scheme agreed by coffee producing governments to reduce supply by increasing the quality of coffee traded. [78053]

Clare Short: The UK Government support the objectives of the 2001 International Coffee Agreement. Co-operation between coffee producing governments to restrict supplies entering the market has been pursued a number of times in the past without much success. The Coffee Retention Plan agreed in 2000 by the Association of Coffee Producing Countries was formally abandoned earlier this year.

The International Coffee Organisation (ICO) Quality Initiative started on 1 October 2002 and has the backing of all ICO producing and consuming countries. The scheme is voluntary and requests that producer members do not export coffee below certain standards set by the organisation. Although the scheme has deficiencies and may cause problems for some exporters it is seen by most producers as a step in the right direction.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to assist producer countries in capturing more value from agricultural commodities. [78055]

Clare Short: DFID is working with developing countries to strengthen their capacity in trade. We are also working to tackle tariff and non-tariff barriers to developing country agricultural exports, especially those that exist in the European Union. It is also important to ensure that a greater proportion of value added, including through processing, is retained in the developing country of origin. DFID provides support to initiatives that provide more timely market information, contributes to improvements in essential infrastructure (including energy and transport) and works to ensure appropriate legal regulatory frameworks exist to promote investment.

CDC Capital Partners

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the publications in which the post of the new chief executive of CDC Capital Partners was advertised. [78667]

Clare Short: The vacancy was advertised in the *Financial Times* on 5 September 2002, and in *The Economist* for that week.

Coffee

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how her Department is helping small coffee producers in developing countries to diversify into alternative livelihoods following the sustained decline in world prices. [78054]

Clare Short: Addressing commodity problems, including those arising from a sustained decline in prices, requires the establishment of a more favourable environment, at both domestic and international level, in order to reduce commodity dependence and encourage value added through processing.

The UK, through its development programme and other endeavours, is supporting a range of actions that seek to expand the trade opportunities for commodity dependent countries. The UK also lends support to a variety of activities within the countries themselves in order to generate the economic growth, and other conditions, that provide enhanced opportunities for livelihood diversification.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the low price of unprocessed coffee on the livelihoods of coffee producers. [78052]

Clare Short: The UK forms part of the European Community's delegation to the International Coffee Organisation (ICO) and which deliberates on coffee matters. In 2001, the ICO organised the first World Coffee Conference and which drew attention to the challenges posed by low coffee prices. The UK is also a member of the Common Fund for Commodities which has a particular interest in the livelihoods of commodity dependent peoples, particularly in the least developed countries.

The main cause of low coffee prices is oversupply, with production far exceeding consumption. Many poor smallholder farmers, particularly in Africa and Latin America, are dependent on coffee for a livelihood. The dramatic fall in prices has therefore had, and continues to have a significant livelihood and development concerns.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is providing to help small coffee producers in developing countries to diversify into alternative livelihoods. [78205]

Clare Short *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* The current situation of historically low coffee prices is having a significant effect on the livelihoods of very large numbers of coffee producers (who are predominantly smallholders) and those working in related industries and services. The income that people derive from the production and sale of commodities like coffee is influenced by a number of market (price, quality requirements) and non-market (pests and disease, weather etc.) factors. Low prices also have substantial macro-economic effects in terms of foreign exchange earnings, income to the exchequer and hence on debt repayment. Many of the poorest countries, particularly in Africa, remain dependent on a narrow range of commodity exports of which coffee is but one example.

The UK, through its development programme and by working at international level, supports programmes that seek to expand the trade opportunities for poor countries and improve the economic, social, environmental and political framework within which commodity-dependent people derive a livelihood. Diversification, both horizontal (into other economic activities or crops) and vertical (greater participation in value-adding activities within the coffee value chain such as processing) forms an important element of this broader approach.

In many countries we are assisting governments to develop poverty reduction strategies that address the needs of poor producers, taking into account commodity dependence. Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda are examples. We also support capacity building of individuals and producer organisations to better enable them to explore alternative markets and options and engage in the supply chain.

DFID provides support to producers and producer groups to meet the growing range of quality (eg food safety) and performance criteria (eg environmental; social) that increasingly characterise developed country market requirements. We also fund research on smaller producers (eg integrated pest management, germplasm quality, post-harvest management) that aims to provide effective and low-cost solutions for those seeking to diversify both vertically and horizontally.

DFID is also working hard to ensure that pressure is maintained for pro-poor trade reform (including CAP reform)—to ensure that any diversification efforts by poor coffee producers in developing countries are not undermined by unfair trade arrangements. We are also, with other Whitehall Departments, working to ensure that the Common Fund for Commodities is more poverty focused.

Country Strategy Papers

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the countries for which her Department has produced country strategy papers. [78972]

Clare Short: Since 1998 DFID has produced country strategy papers for the following countries:

Albania
Bangladesh
Bolivia (first edition 1998, revised 2002)
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burma
Cambodia
Cameroon
China (first edition 1998, revised 2002)
Croatia
Czech Republic
Ghana
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Jamaica
Jordan
Kenya
Kosovo
Malawi
Moldova
Montserrat (policy paper)
Mozambique
Nepal
Nigeria
Peru
Poland
Romania
Russia (first edition 1998, revised 2001)
Rwanda
Slovak Republic
South Africa
Sri Lanka
Tanzania
Uganda
Ukraine (first edition 1998, revised 2001)
Vietnam
Windward Islands
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
Zambia
Zimbabwe

In addition, we have produced the following regional strategy papers:

Baltic States (covering Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania)

Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua)

Central Asia and South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan)

Pacific (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau)

Southern Africa (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland)

Democratic Republic of Congo

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other assistance her Department *(i)* is providing and (ii) plans to provide to the Government of DRC; and if she will make a statement. [77553]

Clare Short: To date UK assistance to DRC has focused on humanitarian and peace building assistance provided through the UN and international NGOs. We have had no direct Government-to-Government assistance programme. However once an inclusive transitional Government has been agreed, the UK will be willing to consider providing direct assistance to the Government of DRC. In the short term we are considering options for Quick start initiatives to demonstrate to the people of DRC the benefits of peace. In the medium term we plan to provide assistance in a number of sectors where we believe we can best add value such as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and support to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process. We will also continue our humanitarian and peace building activities, and will support re-engagement in the DRC by the international financial institutions (IFIs).

Dr. Cable: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* UN Force and *(b)* MONUC representatives are in the Democratic Republic of Congo; what plans there are to send British troops there; what plans there are to increase the number of MONUC representatives; and if she will make a statement. [77641]

Clare Short: On 30 September the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) comprised 4,309 uniformed personnel (military observers, troops and civilian police), and 1,185 civilian personnel. Five of these military observers have been provided by the United Kingdom. There are no plans to send British troops to the DRC.

Last month the Secretary General of the UN (UNSG) produced a report on MONUC's activities, which is now being discussed by the UN Security Council. The principal recommendation of the report is that the cap on MONUC's military personnel be increased from 5,537 to 7,500. We are encouraging the UNSG to get MONUC more focused and effective on DDR, particularly in eastern DRC.

We warmly welcomed the Pretoria and Luanda Agreements which Rwanda and Uganda respectively signed with DRC as major breakthroughs towards peace in the region. We are working closely with all three governments, and that of Burundi, as well as the South Africans and the UNSG who are the third parties in the Pretoria Agreement, to ensure full implementation of these Agreements.

Education

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of the new money announced for International Development in the CSR will be spent on basic education; and how much this represents in real terms. [78217]

Clare Short: Improving education outcomes for poor people is not primarily about donor resources. We are working to help partner Governments put the policies and plans in place which will enable them to accelerate the achievement of universal primary completion. The resources allocated to this will therefore depend on individual country circumstances—but the international community has already made it clear that no country seriously committed to Education for All will be thwarted by lack of resources.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when her Department will announce what resources it will put into the Fast Track Initiative on Education. [78218]

Clare Short: Our approach to the Fast Track Initiative is to help partner Governments put the policies and plans in place which will enable them to accelerate the achievement of universal primary completion. As plans emerge from individual countries, the resources required for implementation will be discussed at the country level. We will determine through this process any additional resources from my Department.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to support education in the Fast Track countries on the list. [78219]

Clare Short: My Department in engaged in over half of the countries included in the Fast Track Initiative. We are working with Governments to improve education policies and plans through a variety of mechanisms, including direct budget support, sectoral budget support and bilateral projects.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of her Department's budget she expects to be spent on basic education in the next three years. [78207]

Clare Short *[holding answer sent 30 October 2002]:* The Government have committed over £700 million to basic education since 1997. At Kananaskis we joined other G8 countries in pledging to increase our bilateral assistance for countries that have demonstrated a strong and credible policy and financial commitment to the goals of achieving universal primary education for all children and equal access to education for girls. We are working closely with partner Governments to help them improve their education policies and plans: actual expenditure will therefore depend on progress made in individual countries.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the Government have contributed to the Education for All plan for each of the last seven years for which records are available. [78009]

Clare Short: The Government have committed over £700 million to basic education since 1997. Annual figures are not readily available.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what target sum she has agreed with her counterparts in other countries should be set for the total budget for the World Bank Education for All programme. [78010]

Clare Short: Improving education outcomes for poor people is not primarily dependant on donor resources but on political commitment at country level. We are working to try to ensure that the Education for All initiative adds value to the efforts to deliver universal primary education by 2015. The resources allocated to this will depend on individual country circumstances. We and the international community have already made it clear that no country seriously committed to Education for All will be thwarted by lack of resources.

Iraq

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the WHO study of possible increased cancer rates in southern Iraq and their causes has begun; and what the UK contribution to the study is proposed to be. [77683]

Clare Short *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The World Health Organisation's (WHO) study has not begun. My Department has not been asked by the WHO for any contribution.

Libya

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of *(a)* poverty levels and *(b)* human rights abuses in Libya. [78672]

Clare Short: Libya is an Upper Middle Income Country with an annual GDP per capita of $7,570 (UN Human Development Report 2001). DFID has no plans to provide assistance to Libya and we have thus not made any detailed assessment of poverty levels or human rights abuses. The FCO's assessment is that Libya's record on human rights is not good, but there are recent signs of improvement (including the release of remaining political prisoners), and Libya is expected to continue to show a commitment to improving its human rights record during its period as chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects her Department supports that operate in Libya. [78721]

Clare Short: None.

Malawi

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in writing off debt for Malawi; and if she will make a statement. [78445]

Clare Short: Malawi is currently eligible for interim debt relief under the Enhanced HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative amounting to some US$91.4 million in total. Relief in 2001 was about $27 million and is estimated at about $50 million (including Japan) for 2002. This relief should be used for increased spending on health, education, and other social priorities. Subject to satisfactory performance, Malawi is scheduled to reach its HIPC Completion Point in the second half of 2003. At this stage, all of Malawi's eligible debt under the initiative will be irrevocably cancelled.

Millennium Declaration

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps have been taken to produce an annual report on progress towards the Millennium Declaration. [77571]

Clare Short: Following the Millennium summit in September 2000, the UN General Assembly mandated the Secretary General to produce annual reports on "Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration", including progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. The first of these reports (reference A/57/270) is available on the UN website at www.un.org

Overseas Aid

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of overseas aid provided by the UK is spent on *(a)* education and *(b)* health; what steps she is taking to increase this percentage; and if she will make a statement. [78523]

Clare Short: The proportion of my Department's bilateral aid programme allocable by sector in 2001–02 was;

Education: 12 per cent.
Health and Population: 20 per cent.

These figures represent expenditure on projects specific to these sectors but do not capture the full extent of our efforts in each policy area because they exclude multisector projects and programmes, strategic funding to civil society organisations and budget support and balance of payments. Also excluded are activities funded through multilateral channels. Education and health and population will remain priorities for future spending. We do not however, support externally imposed targets. We believe support for poverty reduction strategies devoted to meeting the millennium development goals is the right approach and that our programmes should be harmonised with the efforts of other donors behind locally led poverty reduction strategies.

Police Training (South African Development Community)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the UK Government is intending to seek an assurance that training on human rights will become a permanent component of police training programmes in the Southern African Development Community region. [77773]

Clare Short: Poor people are particularly vulnerable both to crime and to weaknesses in the justice system. We believe that justice sector reform needs to be a key part of poverty reduction strategies in many countries. Justice programmes supported by my Department in SADC countries aim to promote respect for human rights, both through training, and through strengthening the accountability of the justice sector. Through such programmes we seek to encourage the integration of human rights principles into the training programmes of police services and other professionals in the justice sector.

Rwanda and Burundi

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the re-establishment of functioning legal institutions in *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Burundi. [78[illegible]9]

Clare Short: The re-establishment of effective legal institutions and the rule of law are crucial for successful reconciliation and future development in both countries.

Rwanda has made significant progress in re-establishing a functioning legal system and rehabilitating the judiciary since the 1994 genocide. The development of a new Constitution will further clarify roles and enable greater effectiveness of the justice system.

The justice system is overstretched by the need to administer justice to people affected by the genocide. The Government are implementing the community-based justice system of Gacaca, which will relieve pressure on existing overburdened legal structures. The introduction of traditional Gacaca trials for genocide related crimes has an important role to play as a key part of the reconciliation process within Rwandan communities. This mechanism is complementary to national trials for more serious genocide related offences and those at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

DFID's programme in Rwanda is committed to the strengthening of governance systems and the elimination of poverty, including support to the Gacaca process.

In Burundi, DFID, with the rest of the international community, is actively supporting the process of implementation of the Arusha Accord for Peace and Reconciliation, which was signed on 28 August 2000. The Arusha Accord includes a Protocol dedicated to democracy and good governance. As well as setting out transitional constitutional and parliamentary arrangements, the Protocol sets out a number of measures aimed at reinforcing the independence of the judiciary and the effectiveness of the justice system. The success of the transition will largely depend on a ceasefire.

DFID has recently established an office in Burundi, and, in partnership with Government, civil society and the international community, is committed to an increasing effort to bring peace and help restart efforts to develop Burundi's full potential.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the Norwegian and Sri Lankan Governments about the peace process in Sri Lanka; and if she will make a statement. [77514]

Clare Short: I met with Prime Minister Wickremasinghe on 28 May 2002. I have also met with Minister for Economic Reform, Milinda Moragoda, twice this year, most recently when he visited the UK in September. Minister Moragoda is a key member of the Government of Sri Lanka negotiating team at the peace talks. My officials are in regular contact with staff of the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to provide support for *(a)* de-mining and *(b)* the resettlement of displaced people in Sri Lanka. [77515]

Clare Short: My Department is providing £2.6 million to a joint Government of Sri Lanka and UN programme to support the resettlement of returning internally displaced persons (IDPs). This covers de-mining, immediate assistance to help restart livelihoods, shelter and provision of education services. In addition, £6.8 million has been provided for long-term OXFAM and SCF programmes which include support for IDPs. Further assistance will be considered in the light of needs assessments currently under way.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support she is providing for projects to tackle poverty in southern Sri Lanka; and if she will make a statement. [77516]

Clare Short: The Government of Sri Lanka intends to ensure that communities in southern Sri Lanka benefit from the peace process, as well as those in the war-torn north and east. My Department already has long term programmes which address the needs of poor people throughout the island of Sri Lanka. These include national programmes to strengthen the quality of, and access to, primary schooling. In addition DFID is financing Oxfam's work with poor people across the country, including the south. My Department will continue to encourage bilateral and multilateral development organisations to ensure that future international assistance responds to the needs of poor people throughout the country.

Transparency Initiative

Dr. Jenny Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 15 October 2002 to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), *Official Report*, column 652W, what discussions the Government had with the Governments of *(a)* Angola, *(b)* Nigeria and *(c)* Sudan regarding becoming partners in the Transparency Initiative. [77057]

Clare Short: We approached several other Governments to seek their support for the initiative on transparency of payments for the extractives industry in the run up to, and during, the recent World Summit for Sustainable Development. Like many of the Governments the UK approached at the time, the

Nigerians were interested in the proposal but needed further internal consultation before they could take a firm position. I understand these to be still ongoing. We have not yet approached Sudan or Angola.

Unexploded Ordnance (Afghanistan)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether those organisations undertaking the clearance of unexploded bomblets following the use of cluster bombs in Afghanistan have the financial and technical resources necessary to maintain current clearance rates. [78850]

Clare Short: DFID's demining adviser has just returned from leading a mission to Afghanistan. The purpose was to analyse the effectiveness of the United Nations Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA), and the Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (MACA) which is responsible for overall planning and co-ordination. I await the results of this evaluation. However on my recent visit to Afghanistan it was frequently suggested that demining was being organised in an exemplary fashion.

DFID is allocating £1.8 million for humanitarian mine action in Afghanistan in the current financial year.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with counterparts in other nations who have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. [78006]

Clare Short: I discuss child rights and development regularly with partners. Discussions focus on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals to which the UK Government are committed. In particular the goals of achieving primary education for all, promoting gender equality and improving child survival are key to meeting the goal of halving absolute poverty by 2015. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child forms one cornerstone for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children in May 2002, to which my Department contributed, committed governments to clear action and objectives for children and young people.

Western Sahel (World Food Programme)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact fighting in the Ivory Coast is having on the World Food Programme's activities in the Western Sahel region. [78202]

Clare Short *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* We have not done an independent assessment on the effect the conflict on Côte d'Ivoire is having on World Food Programme (WFP) activities in the Western Sahel Region of Africa. The UN held an Emergency Regional Contingency Planning meeting in Accra from 17–18 October to discuss the situation and the likely humanitarian needs in Côte d'Ivoire and neighbouring countries. We are awaiting their assessment and are continuing to monitor the situation.

World Food Programme (Africa)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* estimated number of people reliant on food aid and *(b)* estimated amount of food aid required by the World Food Programme is over the next six months for *(i)* Mauritania, (ii) Mali, (iii) Senegal, (iv) Eritrea and *(v)* Ethiopia. [77610]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

(i) Mauritania: (a) The World Food Programme (WFP) has estimated that up to 750,000 people are affected by food shortages. The FAO have just completed an assessment of the situation and more accurate figures should be available soon. *(b)* The WFP Emergency Operation, launched in April, aims to provide 16,231 tonnes of food aid, benefiting 246,500 people until the end of December 2002.

(ii) *Mali: (a)* No humanitarian crisis or large scale food shortages are currently reported.

(b) The WFP is providing 3,765 tonnes of food aid until June 2003 in support of rehabilitation activities for 305,000 people affected by the armed conflict of 1990–95.

(iii) *Senegal: (a)* No humanitarian crisis or large scale food shortages are currently reported. *(b)* The WFP is providing 1,650 tonnes of food aid, benefiting 76,000 people over 18 months until December 2003, in support of populations affected by conflict.

(iv) *Eritrea: (a)* According to recent WFP/FAO assessments, approximately 1.04 million of the most vulnerable people in Eritrea will *(b)* require 140, 000 tonnes of food aid in 2003.

(v) Ethiopia: (a) The UN estimates that upwards of six million people require food assistance at present. *(b)* WFP assess unmet food aid needs for the remainder of this year at approximately 70,000 tonnes and a further 263,000 tonnes for the first three months of next year.

PRIME MINISTER

CAP Reform

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what matters in respect of reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the United Kingdom rebate were discussed with President Chirac of France at the European Summit in Brussels on 25th October. [78652]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I gave in the House on Monday 28 October and the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) in the House on Wednesday 30 October, *Official Report*, column 865.

Correspondence

Mr Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan of 4th July on nuclear power. [78802]

The Prime Minister: I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Energy and Construction replied on my behalf on 10 August.

Hawk Sale (India)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what guarantees he has obtained from his Indian counterpart in the course of recent discussions that BAe Systems Hawk aircraft will, if purchased by India, only be used for training purposes; [78853]

(2) what percentage of the time he spent in discussions with his Indian counterpart at Chequers on 19th October was spent *(a)* lobbying for the purchase of BAe Systems Hawk aircraft and *(b)* on other matters. [78854]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) on 28 October, *Official Report*, column 604W.

Middle East

Mr Drew: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made with his offer to convene a peace conference between Israel and the Palestinians. [79044]

The Prime Minister: The immediate priorities are for the quartet (the US, EU, UN and Russia) to agree a roadmap leading to a comprehensive settlement by 2005, and for the parties to commit to implementing it. We believe that a conference of the parties involved in the peace process should be a key element of that roadmap. We are examining how we can best contribute to achieving this goal.

Parliamentary Recall

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will propose changes to Standing Order No 13 to grant the power to initiate a recall of Parliament to the Speaker. [78844]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Scottish MPs (Redundancy Payments)

Mr. Swire: To ask the Prime Minister what the anticipated cost is of one-off redundancy payments to Scottish MPs losing their seats as a result of the proposed reduction in the number of Westminster constituencies; from what budget they will be paid; and if he will make it his policy to extend such payments to English MPs who lose their seats as a result of the redrawing of boundaries by the Boundaries Commission. [77956]

The Prime Minister: There are no arrangements for additional compensation for Members who lose their seats as a result of the redrawing of boundaries by the Boundaries Commission. All Members of Parliament who retire or are defeated at a General Election are entitled to payment of a resettlement grant. The amount of the grant is calculated on the basis of age and length of service, and the cost involved is determined by the actual Members who are ultimately affected. The resettlement grant is available to all eligible Members of Parliament.

Sellafield

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what matters in respect of Sellafield were raised by his Irish counterpart at the Heads of Government Summit in Brussels on 25th October; and what response he made. [78651]

The Prime Minister The Taoiseach did not raise Sellafield at the Brussels European Council on 25 October. However, Irish concerns over Sellafield have been made clear through other fora. We continue to respond as fully as possible to such concerns and to assure the Irish Government that we take very seriously our responsibilities in respect of the effective and safe management of the Sellafield site.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Postalisation of Gas Prices

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce postalisation of gas prices in Northern Ireland. [78801]

Mr. Pearson: The provisions to give effect to postalisation of gas transmission costs were included in the draft Energy Bill which had entered Committee stage prior to the suspension of the devolved Administration. Subject to the Secretary of State's consent, it would be my intention that the Energy Bill would be converted to an Order in Council and included in the programme for the next legislative session.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Regulator are involved in ongoing discussions with the pipeline owners about the precise arrangements for introducing postalisation.

Public Employees

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many public employees there are in Northern Ireland; and what percentage they represent of the overall workforce in Northern Ireland. [78335]

Mr. Pearson: At June 2002, there were 204,952 public sector employee jobs in Northern Ireland. This represents 27.1 per cent. of the workforce jobs figure for Northern Ireland.

Selective Education

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions his Department has had with the Department for Education and Skills regarding the future of selective education in Northern Ireland. [79251]

Jane Kennedy: The review of post-primary education was taken forward by the devolved Administration. No formal discussions have been held with the Department for Education and Skills.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Business Organisation (West Midlands)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the business organisations in the West Midlands with which he makes it his policy to consult on matters of relevance to the business sector. [79488]

Mr. Leslie: An example of recent consultation undertaken across the West Midlands region by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister related to draft Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands. The list set out follows shows the range of business organisations consulted on that occasion.

BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS IN THE WEST MIDLANDS CONSULTED ON DRAFT REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE

Advantage West Midlands
Birmingham and Solihull Chamber of Commerce
Birmingham and Solihull Business Link
Birmingham City 2000 (now known as Birmingham Forward)
Black Country Chamber and Business Link
[1] British Property Federation (Based in London)
[1] British Retail Consortium (Based in London)
British Trade International
Business in the Community
CBI West Midlands
Country Landowners Association
Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce
Coventry and Warwickshire Business Link
Coventry and Warwickshire Co-operative Development Agency
Coventry and Warwickshire Partnerships Ltd.
East Mercia Chamber of Commerce
Engineering Employers Federation
Federation of Small Businesses
Freight Transport Association
Heart of England Tourist Board
Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce and Business Link
House Builders Federation
Institute of Asian Businesses
Institute of Directors
Institution of Highways and Transportation
Midlands Environmental Business Club
National Farmers Union
North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce
Staffordshire Business Link
Road Haulage Association
[1] Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Ltd. (Based in London)
Shropshire Chamber and Business Link
West Midlands Business Policy Group
West Midlands Enterprise Board
West Midlands Rural Network
West Midlands Regional Group of Chambers of Commerce

[1] Not located in the West Midland region

Council Housing

Alan Simpson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister where council tenants vote against the transfer of housing stock to an arm's length management organisation or other social landlord, how the local authority will access the debt write-off provisions offered by the Government. [79067]

Mr. McNulty: Where council tenants vote against the transfer of housing stock to a Registered Social Landlord (RSL), their authority's attributable housing debt will continue to be serviced through Housing Revenue Account subsidy and the provisions for addressing overhanging debt will not arise. Overhanging debt payment is only made when transfer is to an RSL, it does not apply to transfers to Arm's Length Management Organisations (ALMOs), as the authority still owns the stock.

Domestic Fires

David Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people were killed in domestic house fires in the last year, broken down by region. [78551]

Mr. Raynsford: The table shows fatal casualties in dwelling fires attended by local authority fire brigades in the UK in 2000 by region. 2000 is the latest year for which data are available.

Fatal casualties in dwelling fires[1,2] by region and brigade area, UK, 2000[3]

	Fatal casualties	
United Kingdom	445	[4] (447)
England and Wales	365	[4] (367)
England		340
North East		13
Cleveland		1
Durham		6
Northumberland		1
Tyne and Wear		5
North West	69	
Cheshire		6
Cumbria		3
Greater Manchester		22
Lancashire		17
Merseyside		21
Yorkshire and The Humber		41
Humberside		7
North Yorkshire		2
South Yorkshire		10
West Yorkshire		22
East Midlands		23
Derbyshire		9
Leicestershire		4
Lincolnshire		4
Northamptonshire		3
Nottinghamshire		3
West Midlands		51
Hereford and Worcester		3
Shropshire		8
Staffordshire		8
Warwickshire		6
West Midlands		26
East of England		36
Bedfordshire		5
Cambridgeshire		3
Essex		10
Hertfordshire		6
Norfolk		8
Suffolk		4
South East		43
Berkshire		5
Buckinghamshire		7
East Sussex		3
Hampshire		9
Isle of Wight		0
Kent		9

Fatal casualties in dwelling fires[1,2] by region and brigade area, UK, 2000[3]

	Fatal casualties
Oxfordshire	1
Surrey	6
West Sussex	3
South West	19
Avon	4
Cornwall	4
Devon	7
Dorset	1
Gloucestershire	2
Isles of Scilly	0
Somerset	1
Wiltshire	0
London	45
Wales	25
North Wales	3
Mid and West Wales	14
South Wales	8
Northern Ireland	13
Scotland	67
Strathclyde	39
Highland and Islands	3
Grampian	5
Tayside	5
Lothian and Borders	12
Fife	3
Central	0
Dumfries	0

[1] Including late call and heat and smoke damage incidents.
[2] Including caravans, houseboats and other non-building permanent dwellings.
[3] Data are provisional and fatality figures are likely to be revised downwards as later information becomes available.
[4] Estimates of the revised figures for United Kingdom and England and Wales are shown in brackets.

Exchange Flags

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress is being made in resolving the dispute concerning funding given to the Walton Group for its regeneration of Exchange Flags, Liverpool. [78758]

Mr. McNulty: English Partnerships, acting as agent for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, is continuing its legal action for the return of all public money and subsequent legal costs expended on the Exchange Flags building, Liverpool. The date for trial has been set for the week beginning 18 November 2002.

For legal reasons, I cannot comment further at the present time. I shall write to my hon. Friend when more information is available.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the executive agencies affiliated to his Department. [79684]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is responsible for the following executive agencies:

Fire Service College
The Planning Inspectorate
The Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
The Rent Service

In addition Ordnance Survey, a separate non-ministerial Government Department, and executive agency, is the responsibility of ODPM Ministers.

FD Services Ltd

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the contracts which his Department has entered into with FD Services Ltd. [78905]

Mr. Leslie: The financial systems of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister contain no record of any contracts with FD Services Limited.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Heath: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what information he has received from the Chief Fire Officer of Somerset on his assessment of the adequacy of fire cover in areas of the Somerton and Frome constituency during a firefighters' strike. [77111]

Mr. Raynsford: The Chief Fire Officer of Somerset Fire Brigade sent a short e-mail to officials at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 20 September, in which he expressed the view that strike action at two retained stations in Somerset would potentially leave a significant number of road traffic accidents uncovered.

Emergency cover in Somerset, as for the rest of the country, will consist of a number of elements including Green Goddesses, breathing apparatus teams (BARTs), a rescue team equipped with specialist equipment (REST) and the police. The BARTs and RESTs carry basic cutting and other rescue equipment, and have been trained to respond to road traffic accidents.

The provision of MOD emergency cover has been planned in consultation with Chief Fire Officers to maximise the effectiveness of call-outs and the availability of a range of firefighting capabilities. The MOD's emergency cover will not replicate the firefighting capabilities of the Fire Service, but will aim to minimise the danger to human life.

Retained firefighters provide a very valuable service to their communities. We expect that during industrial action many retained firefighters would continue to protect the communities in which they live and work.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* full-time equivalent firefighters there were in Lancashire in each of the last five years. [78626]

Mr. Leslie: The following table shows the latest available information on the number of wholetime firefighters and strength (in 24 hour units of cover) of retained firefighters in Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service.

Year	*Wholetime*	*Retained*
1997–98	987	339
1998–99	1,007	321
1999–2000	1,008	304
2001–01	1,010	285
2001–02[1]	1,002	268

[1] Provisional

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether *(a)* professional firemen, *(b)* retained firefighters and *(c)* other publicly employed persons are insured, including the death in service provision, when dealing with a fire or other incident during a firefighters' strike. [77607]

Mr. Leslie: Professional and retained firefighters who are on duty during any FBU industrial action will be fully covered by the standard insurance, death and pension benefits as normal. Members of the armed forces will benefit from the same cover and support as is provided for any operational duty. Police officers are afforded protection in the event of injury while on duty by the provisions of the Police Pension Regulations in the case of death or permanent disablement. In the event of temporary disablement the arrangements for contractual sick pay would safeguard the officer from immediate financial loss.

Housing Associations

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the housing associations; how many houses they have built and acquired over the last five years; and how many of these have been allocated to *(a)* those on their existing waiting list and *(b)* those outside their area. [77871]

Mr. McNulty: A full list of the 2,033 housing associations registered with the Housing Corporation is available on the corporation's website at www.housingcorp.gov.uk

Only about one quarter of registered housing associations undertake development. Over the last five years, housing associations have completed the following number of dwellings, through new-build or acquisition and redevelopment, via funding from the Housing Corporation's approved development programme (ADP) and local authority social housing grant (LASHG):

	Approved development programme	*Local authority social housing grant*
1997–98	35,418	10,152
1998–99	31,960	9,929
1999–2000	25,040	8,678
2000–01	22,354	8,419
2001–02	22,875	6,971

Information is not available about the allocation of housing association dwellings to people on existing waiting lists or from elsewhere. The Housing Corporation's regulatory code states that registered housing associations must work with local authorities to enable the latter to fulfil their duties to homeless households and people in priority housing need; to the vulnerable and those covered by the Government's Supporting People policy.

Local Government Finance

14. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a summary of the responses to his consultation on reform of local government finance. [77027]

Mr. Raynsford: A summary of responses to the consultation on the formula grant review will be published and placed in the Library before the Government's proposals for the future grant distribution system are announced at around the beginning of December.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions his Department has had with the F40 group in the review of the local government education funding formula to provide a more even funding system for rural and inner city schools. [78878]

Mr. Raynsford: My colleagues and I had discussions with both the F40 as a group and some of their 36 constituent authorities as part of the consultation on the Formula Grant Review.

Similar discussions have taken place between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's officials and officers representing F40 members. We are currently taking decisions on the new system to be that we will propose following that consultation. In doing so we are considering carefully the evidence, pressures and representations that we received, including those from F40 authorities and campaigners.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services delivered by the East Riding of Yorkshire council. [79166]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of rural deprivation in the local government formula grant review. [79167]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend, the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account he has taken of the extra cost of providing services in rural areas in the local government formula grant review. [79168]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account he has taken of the extra cost of providing services in rural areas in the local government formula grant review. [78879]

Mr. Raynsford: The formula grant review options that were put forward as part of the summer consultation were informed by evidence on relative costs of providing services across the country. We are currently taking decisions on the new system to be implemented following that consultation, and in doing so are considering carefully all of the evidence, pressures and representations that we received, including those from rural areas.

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services in *(a)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(b)* North Lincolnshire. [78881]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce the new system for distributing Formula Grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be around the start of December. Once the Government has allocated its grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research was done by his Department into the impact of dispersal and settlement patterns on the cost of providing services in rural areas as part of the local government formula grant review. [78882]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister commissioned research into the impact of sparsity, dispersal and settlement patterns as part of the work on the Environmental, Protective & Cultural Services block. In addition other Government departments have undertaken such research covering the services for which they are primarilyresponsible. Officials have also discussed sparsity issues with local government colleagues over the past 18 months in technical groups covering all service blocks. This informed the options put forward in the Formula Grant Review consultation document. We are currently taking decisions on the new system to be implemented following that consultation, and in doing so are considering carefully all of the evidence, pressures and representations that we received, including those from rural areas.

Local Government Officers

Ian Lucas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to revise the Widdecombe Rules on political activity of local government officers. [76625]

Mr. Raynsford: We intend to conduct a review looking at political restrictions on local government officers, and to publish a consultation paper containing proposals, in due course.

Neighbourhood Management Scheme

Ms Buck: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to announce a further round of the Neighbourhood Management scheme. [78629]

Mrs. Roche: We are considering proposals for a second round of Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders and hope to make an announcement in the near future.

Non-department Public Bodies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the non-departmental public bodies affiliated to his Department. [79665]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is responsible for sponsoring the following Non-Departmental Public Bodies:

Advisory Panel on Beacon Councils
Advisory Panel on Standards for the Planning Inspectorate
Audit Commission
Building Regulations Advisory Committee
Community Forum
Commission for New Towns/English Partnerships
Castle Vale Housing Action Trust
Housing Corporation
Liverpool Housing Action Trust
Property Advisory Group
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales
Rent Assessment Panels
Standards Board for England
Stonebridge Housing Action Trust
Tower Hamlets Housing Action Trust
Valuation Tribunals

Park Homes

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will place a copy of the survey on the economics of park homes in the Library. [78908]

Mr. McNulty: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the member for St. Helens North (Mr. Watts) on 29 October 2002, *Official report*, column 680W.

Planning

Mr. Willis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the planning appeals and their location by local planning authority that have been dismissed on the grounds of health concerns in each of the last three years. [79042]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many public service agreements have been entered into with local authorities in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement; [79593]

(2) if he will list the local authorities which have entered into public service agreements; and if he will make a statement. [79594]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 292W.

Recruitment (Over-50s)

20. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of new recruits to his Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79308]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was formed in May 2002. As part of the former DETR(C) and DTLR(C) the percentage figures for each year for new recruits aged 50 and over in the period requested is as follows:

1. 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 = 7.25 per cent.
2. 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 = 6.5 per cent.

Regional Assemblies

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 389–90W, how he defines the word stakeholder; and if he will list the categories of stakeholders consulted. [79346]

Mr. Raynsford: 'Your Region, Your Choice', the White Paper on regional governance, includes business, trade unions, the voluntary and community sectors, local authorities and other key partners in the public sector, and environmental groups as examples of stakeholders. However, the White Paper is not prescriptive. We would consider that any organisation with an interest in regional governance can be considered as a stakeholder.

The White Paper did not sound out particular stakeholders or groups of stakeholders for consultation. It invited anyone with views on stakeholder involvement with elected regional assemblies to submit their comments.

Registered Social Landlords

Mr. Steen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will *(a)* list the total debt of each registered social landlord in England and Wales in the last financial year, *(b)* identify what percentage of each of each debt was incurred through borrowing for council housing stock transfer and *(c)* state from where. [78916]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested entails listing all social landlords registered with the Housing Corporation of which there are around 2,000. Due to the volume of material, I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information is collated.

Rural Deprivation

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of rural deprivation in the local government formula grant review. [78880]

Mr. Raynsford: The formula grant review options that were put forward as part of the summer consultation were informed by evidence on relative costs of providing services across the country. Further work on measuring deprivation was carried out during the consultation period as part of discussions with groups representing rural authorities. We are currently taking decisions on the new system to be implemented following that consultation, and in doing so are considering carefully all of the evidence, pressures and representations that we received, including those from rural areas.

Rural Services

Mr. Cran: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research has been undertaken by his Department into the impact of dispersal and settlement patterns on the cost of providing services in rural areas as part of the local government formula grant review. [79165]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002.

Your Region Your Choice

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister with reference to paragraph 9.21 of the 'Your Region, Your Choice' White Paper, what account he has taken of the other views invited; and if he will publish the views submitted. [79347]

Mr. Raynsford: Other than the specific request for views on stakeholder involvement with elected regional assemblies to be submitted by 31 August 2002, the White Paper 'Your Region, Your Choice' was not a formal consultation exercise. The White Paper indicated that the Government would also be interested in views on its other proposals, but there is no deadline and views may still be submitted. We have no plans to publish these views, but we will take them into account as we implement our proposals.

DEFENCE

Live Animals (Exports)

3. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the aims and objectives of the future offensive air system programme. [76695]

Mr. Hoon: The Future Offensive Air System programme is intended to replace the offensive air capability currently provided by the Tornado GR4 strike aircraft towards the end of the next decade. The programme is currently in the concept stage. No final decisions have been taken.

National Missile Defence

15. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent discussions he has had with his United States counterpart on national missile defence. [76708]

Mr. Hoon: I last discussed missile defence issues with the United States Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, at our meeting in Washington on 11 September.

Regular and Territorial Armies

19. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by how much the strength of the *(a)* regular and *(b)* territorial armies have changed since May 1997; and by how much the number of medically unfit soldiers has changed over the same period. [76712]

Mr. Ingram: In June 1997 the strength of the regular army was 101,360, of which 6.7 per cent. were listed as not employable at full combatant duties. In September this year, these figures were 101,660 and 10. 4 per cent. respectively.

In June 1997 the strength of the territorial army stood at 55, 470. The strategic defence review vision for the territorial army was to restructure it into a more relevant, usable and integrated organisation. The current strength of the territorial army, as at 1 September 2002, stands at 38,835. This includes 400 who are currently mobilised in support of operations.

Middle East

20. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of British forces in international peacekeeping in the middle east region. [76713]

Mr. Hoon: The Strategic Defence Review concluded that our national interests are directly affected by events in the middle east. The deployment of United Kingdom armed forced to Oman for exercise Saif Sareea II graphically illustrated our commitment to stability in the region.

Royal Air Force aircraft continue to patrol the no fly zones over Iraq in support of UN SCR 688, which demanded that Saddam Hussein end the repression of his own people. We also contribute a small contingent of British armed forces personnel to the UN Iraq Kuwait Observer Mission established under UN SCR 687 to monitor the defined border and demilitarised zone between Iraq and Kuwait.

Armed Forces (Careers)

21. **Mr. Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures the Ministry of Defence is taking to promote the armed forces as a career to students in schools. [76715]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Cunningham).

High-Tech Equipment

23. **Lawrie Quinn:** What measures his Department is taking to enhance opportunities within the engineering industry to enter into partnership development roles during the procurement of high-tech equipment and software for the armed forces. [76717]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence recognises that partnerships with industry in high-tech areas are crucial to military capability and to the UK Defence Industry. The Ministry of Defence has recently launched the "Towers of Excellence" and Defence Technology Centres. These are mechanisms for partnering with industry and academia in priority high technology areas. We are also taking steps, via the National Defence & Aerospace's Systems Panel, to ensure that Ministry of Defence and Department of Trade and Industry Science and Technology spending is fully co-ordinated.

22. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans have been made to train armed forces personnel to carry out duties as firefighters. [76716]

24. **Hugh Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of the Army during the firefighters' dispute. [76718]

35. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces have been assigned to providing emergency fire and rescue cover in the event of a national firemen's strike. [76729]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire).

38. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the firefighters' strike on the training and operational effectiveness of the armed forces. [76732]

Mr. Ingram: The Armed Forces have been particularly busy over the last few years performing their primary duties in defence of United Kingdom interests and acting as a force for good. The deployment to provide emergency fire cover will inevitably impact on their ability to continue some of these tasks at the same level of effort. The longer service personnel are required to provide fire cover the greater the penalties that will accrue to other activities, and in particular on the Armed Forces personnel employed on these duties in place of professional firefighters.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence personnel have been trained on equipment introduced in the last 10 years; and what scope there is for training more to help with the current firefighters' strike. [77502]

Mr. Ingram: 31 Breathing Apparatus Rescue Teams (BARTS) and 59 Rescue Equipment Support Teams (RESTS)—a total of about 2,500 personnel—will be deployed should a fire strike take place. They will be fully trained, and provided with modern equipment, to undertake fire rescues and release road traffic accident victims.

The 10,000 military personnel trained to operate Green Goddess fire tenders provided by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will provide basic levels of emergency cover in helping to bring fires under control, and they will act in support of BART and REST teams when fire rescue is required.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what preparations he has made to ensure the safety and continuity of service to the public in the event of a firefighters' strike; and what the cost is to the Department of these actions. [77661]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 527W, by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The cost of providing emergency cover will depend on the extent and nature of any industrial action.

Service Families Taskforce

25. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the service families taskforce. [76719]

Mr. Ingram: The service families taskforce was set up by the Government in 1999 to deal with service family issues that were outside the control of the Ministry of Defence. However, it is now the tri-Service focus for family issues, both internal and external.

Representatives of service families meet a Minister twice a year to discuss the issues that are of concern to them. In addition, bilateral meetings are held with other Government Departments, as necessary, to discuss changes to any rules and regulations that are considered detrimental to, and discriminate against, service families.

Some are of progress by the Task Force over the last year are:

(a) The new Adoption legislation has been amended to ensure that Service families will not be disadvantaged when overseas.

(b) Legislative changes have been made to enable the Inland Revenue to pay Working Families Tax Credit to Service families on overseas postings.

(c) We have resolved the problems that some Service spouses had encountered in claiming Child Support Agency payments when on an overseas posting.

(d) As a result of discussions with the Department for Education and Skills, the new Code of Practice for School Admissions in England due for publication next year contains specific reference to Service families. This will assist the schools admissions process for their children.

Joint Strike Fighter Project

26. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress there has been to advance UK participation in the joint strike fighter project. [76720]

Mr. Hoon: The recent announcement of the selection of the Short Take off and Vertical Landing variant of Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) to meet the United Kingdom Joint Combat Aircraft requirement reaffirmed our participation in the JSF programme. This decision has been well received by UK industry.

United Kingdom companies have already secured key roles within the programme as a result of their outstanding technology and ability to deliver value for money. Industry estimates that its involvement could be worth up to £27 billion over the whole life of the programme, creating or securing some 8,500 jobs. In addition, we are working closely with the US authorities to facilitate further involvement of UK companies and we are placing particular emphasis on arrangements to smooth the transfer of technology between the US and UK. This builds on the considerable progress already made under the declaration of principles.

NATO

27. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last discussed with NATO counterparts the potential enlargement of the Alliance; and if he will make a statement. [76721]

Mr. Hoon: I regularly discuss a range of NATO issues, including enlargement, with my Alliance colleagues; I did so most recently at the informal meeting of Defence Ministers in Warsaw in September. The United Kingdom remains a strong supporter of enlargement and continues to look forward to a robust round at Prague.

30. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last discussed with NATO counterparts the potential enlargement of the alliance; and if he will make a statement. [76724]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Mr Jenkins).

Service Personnel (Wales)

28. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* service personnel and *(b)* agency staff in the defence field are employed in Wales; and how many were employed in 1992. [76722]

Mr. Ingram: The number of fire service personnel currently employed in Wales on Ministry of Defence and QinetiQ sites is 105. This figure covers contract, civilian, and service personnel. As at August 2002, there were 3,733 Agency staff based in Wales; this figure includes those staff working for Trading Fund agencies.

Information on fire service personnel and Agency staff employed in 1992 is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Desert Terrain Equipment

29. **Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the suitability of the equipment available to the British armed forces for conflict in desert terrain. [76723]

Mr. Ingram: The recent Exercise SAIF SAREEA 2 allowed us to identify and assess the challenge our armed forces could face when operating in testing desert conditions. This major exercise enabled us to evaluate strengths and indicated where we might make improvements to our equipment and procedures. As a result of the post-exercise evaluation, we are carrying out equipment enhancement programmes to meet the demands of desert environments.

Bullying

31. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to combat bullying in the armed forces. [76725]

Mr. Ingram: The services' policy is that no form of harassment or intimidation will be tolerated; all allegations are investigated, and appropriate action taken. Potential recruits are made fully aware of this policy and it is set out in the Armed Forces Diversity policy issued in June 2002. A confidential helpline is available in case of need. Officers and senior ranks have the responsibility to preserve good order and discipline at all times, and this is reinforced on appropriate training courses. All of these measures are kept under review and adjusted as necessary.

Test and Evaluation Ranges

32. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's work to find alternative commercial opportunities at test and evaluation ranges. [76726]

Mr. Ingram: Over the next year, Defence Estates will be closely examining QinetiQ's rationalisation plans for test and evaluation ranges to identify whether any property can be declared surplus to Ministry of Defence requirements and released for commercial opportunities. In addition, the Defence Diversification

Agency (DDA) continues to work in support of the regional development agencies, which assume overall responsibility for economic regeneration issues. Wherever possible, the DDA assists local communities to secure diversification opportunities through the use of Ministry of Defence technology transfer, expertise and information sharing.

Civil Emergencies

33. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of *(a)* the Army and *(b)* the Royal Navy in assisting with UK civil emergencies. [76727]

Mr. Ingram: All three armed forces provide support to the civil authorities during civil emergencies under well understood, long-standing arrangements. These fall into three broad categories: military aid to the civil community, which is provided at times of life-threatening emergency; military aid to other Government Departments, which is provided when essential services cannot be maintained in any other way, and military aid to the civil power which is the provision of specialist support to the police and other law enforcement agencies.

Warships

34. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy warships are operational. [76728]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently 80 HM ships and submarines in the operational fleet. This includes all vessels that are operational or engaged in preparing for service, trials or training.

Reserves

37. **Ross Cranston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress has been made in enhancing the role of the reserves in home defence; and if he will make a statement. [76731]

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced the full implementation of our proposals for the use of the Reserves in home defence and security in the House on 31 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 1023.

The new arrangements will provide significant improvements in three areas. An enhanced regionally-based planning and command capability will make it easier for the authorities dealing with civil contingencies to secure rapid support from the Armed Forces, both Regular and Reserve. An integrated communications infrastructure will be provided by a Territorial Army unit, 2 (National Communications) Signals Brigade, for which we are acquiring new communications equipment compatible with that being introduced in the emergency services. Finally, we are establishing 14 Civil Contingency Reaction Forces, each of some 500 volunteers from existing Reservists, to provide a new planned capability to assist the emergency services and other authorities at short notice.

In total the Reserve Forces will receive an addition of some 700 new posts and some 130,000 man-training days.

Army Recruits

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Army regiments are running at more than *(a)* five and *(b)* ten per cent. below their recommended complement of non-commissioned officers, and if he will make a statement [78274]

(2) how many Army regiments are running at more than *(a)* five and *(b)* ten per cent. below their recommended complement of commissioned officers; and if he will make a statement. [78273]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held by Regiment, but by Arms/Corps. Those Arms/Corps running at more than five per cent. below their recommended compliment of non-commissioned officers and warrant officers are shown in the table.

	Percentage
Warrant Officers	
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	−37.9
Non-Commissioned Officers	
Royal Artillery	−12.1
Royal Signals	−9.4
Infantry	−8.8
Army Air Corps	−21.2
Royal Logistics Corps	−6.4
Royal Army Medical Corps	−16.9
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	−11.8
Royal Army Veterinary Corps	−25.0
Small Arms School Corps	−12.2
Army Physical Training Corps	−31.4
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	−40.9

Those Arms/Corps running at more than ten per cent. below their recommended compliment of non-commissioned officers and warrant officers are shown in the following table.

	Percentage
Warrant Officers	
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	−37.9
Non-Commissioned Officers	
Royal Artillery	−12.1
Army Air Corps	−21.2
Royal Army Medical Corps	−16.9
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	−11.8
Royal Army Veterinary Corps	−25.0
Small Arms School Corps	−12.2
Army Physical Training Corps	−31.4
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	−40.9

Non-commissioned officers are those soldiers with the rank of Lance Corporal up to and including Staff Sergeant. Warrant Officers are not classified as non-commissioned officers, the data has been included for completeness. All figures are as at 1 September 2002 and for trained personnel only.

Those Arms/Corps running at more than five per cent. below their recommended compliment of commissioned officers are shown in the following table.

	Percentage
Royal Signals	5.8
Army Air Corps	8.9

	Percentage
Royal Army Chaplains Department	9.7
Royal Army Medical Corps	27.0
Adjutant General's Corps (Provost)	8.5
Adjutant General's Corps (Staff and Personnel Support)	14.8
Royal Army Veterinary Corps	17.4
Royal Army Dental Corps	5.6
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	19.9
Corps of Army Music	5.6

Those Arms/Corps running at more than ten per cent. below their recommended compliment of commissioned officers are shown in the following table.

	Percentage
Royal Army Medical Corps	27.0
Adjutant General's Corps (Staff and Personnel Support)	14.8
Royal Army Veterinary Corps	17.4
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	19.9

All figures are as at 1 September 2002 and for trained personnel only.

BAE Systems

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long the arrangement whereby employees of BAE Systems work on secondment to his Department has been in place, and where those staff are based; how many employees of BAE Systems are on secondment to the his Department; and how many employees of other defence manufacturers are on secondment to his Department, with the number of employees per company. [75229]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 21 October 2002]:* The interchange of personnel between the public and commercial sectors is an important feature of the Ministry of Defence's long-standing programme to build stronger links with other sectors of the economy. This programme aims to enhance business performance by exchanging ideas, skills and experience. Encouraging interchange activities is a key part of the Civil Service reform agenda.

The information requested on inward secondees from defence manufacturers to the MOD is as follows:

Parent Company	*Number and location*	*Total*
BAE Systems	3 based in Bath 2 based in London 1 based in Bristol	6
Rolls Royce plc	Both based in Bath	2

In addition, there are currently two secondees from QinetiQ, one based in Bristol and one based in London.

Defence Logistics Organisation

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of the introduction by the Defence Logistics Organisation of a single IT system for recording and controlling stocks; and what practical difficulties are still to be addressed. [78315]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Logistics Organisation does not currently plan to introduce a single IT system for recording and controlling stocks.

EU-NATO Consultative Structures

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what permanent arrangements have been put in place to formalise structures and procedures for consultations between EU and NATO; and if he will make a statement. [77815]

Mr. Hoon: The arrangements for consultation between EU and NATO are set out in Annexe VII to Annexe VI of the Presidency Conclusions of the December 2000 Nice European Council. The arrangements for consultation outside times of crisis, as set out in part II of Annexe VII, are now in place.

European Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the European Rapid Reaction Force will be operational; and if he will make a statement. [77812]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 348W.

Ferry Services (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether ferry services in and out of Portsmouth harbour were suspended on 26 and 27 October due to dangerous weather conditions; who made the decision as to whether to suspend the services; and if he will make a statement. [78540]

Mr. Ingram: In the event of adverse weather conditions, it is for individual ferry operators to decide whether to suspend services or not. Weather conditions affect some types of vessels more than others, and some ferry operators suspended their services while others did not.

Fleet Air Arm

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he plans to supplement the Fleet Air Arm with additional pilots from foreign and commonwealth countries in order to achieve full manning for the 150 F35 aircraft, once they are acquired. [77935]

Mr. Ingram: As announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement, Lord Bach, on 30 September, it has been decided to purchase up to 150 short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) versions of the Lockheed Martin F35s to meet the future joint combat aircraft (FJCA) requirement for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. These aircraft, which are due to enter service in 2012 with the first unit of a new class of carrier, will replace both the land and carrier-based Harrier aircraft of Joint Force Harrier.

No final decision on aircraft numbers has yet been taken. The current planning assumptions to procure up to 150 includes not only front-line aircraft, but also provision for training, maintenance, trials, and attrition.

It is planned that, as with Joint Force Harrier, both Royal Navy and Royal Air Force pilots will fly the F35 aircraft when it enters into front-line service. The exact requirements for front-line crews for the successor joint force have yet to be determined by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. On current planning assumptions it will not be necessary to supplement aircrew manning of the joint force from foreign and Commonwealth countries, as we are confident we will be able to fully man the force with regular Royal Navy and Royal Air Force pilots. However, as with all current operational and training squadrons, exchange personnel from foreign and Commonwealth countries may well fill some posts.

Gulf War Syndrome

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current research programmes funded by the UK Government that involve examinations of UK Gulf War veterans. [78607]

Dr. Moonie: The current research programmes funded by the Ministry of Defence involving medical examinations of United Kingdom Gulf veterans are as follows:

A study by researchers at Guy's, King's and St. Thomas' School of Medicine who carried out clinical tests on number of Gulf veterans who reported significant neuromuscular symptoms in their responses to an earlier epidemiological study funded by the United States Department of Defense. Work is now complete and the findings are expected to be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal before the end of this year.

A study by a team at Manchester Royal Infirmary who analysed the levels of paraoxanase in blood samples collected by researchers at Guy's, King's and St. Thomas' School of Medicine (blood sample collection was not Ministry of Defence funded). Work is now complete and the results are expected to be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

The Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme (GVMAP) established in 1993, continues to see patients following a referral from their doctors. Patients seen at the GVMAP undergo a battery of standard tests and if clinically justified, further tests are carried out. The clinical findings for 3,000 service and ex-service patients who attended the GVMAP in the period between 11 October 1993 and 18 June 2001 were published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* on 1 October 2002.

HMS Nottingham

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a decision will be made as to where HMS Nottingham will be repaired upon its return to the UK from Australia; what the procurement process will be for the repair work that is needed to HMS Nottingham; and if he will make a statement. [77690]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 143W, to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock). Bids from those companies invited to tender for any repair work will be assessed during Nottingham's journey back to the United Kingdom. Should the decision be taken to repair her, the intention would be to award a contract before she makes landfall in the United Kingdom.

HMS St. Albans

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the sea trials of HMS St. Albans to recommence; and if he will make a statement. [78509]

Mr. Ingram: St. Albans completed her sea trials and became available to the Fleet Time on 30 September 2002.

Until the full damage assessment is complete, and repair options have been considered, it is not possible to say when St. Albans will be able to resume her programme of operational training. Initial indications are that this might be achieved early in 2003.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest assessment is of the work needed to repair HMS St. Albans; how long this work will take; who will pay for it; and if he will make a statement. [78511]

Mr. Ingram: The extent of the damage sustained by HMS St. Albans is still being assessed, and until this completed it is not possible to determine how long the repair work will take. An investigation into the circumstances which led to the incident is underway and pending its outcome it is premature to say where repair costs will fall.

Home Defence

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on home defence priorities and how they have changed since 11September 2001. [76707]

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has lead Government responsibility for counter-terrorist policy and security within the United Kingdom, and maintains oversight of the measures being taken to strengthen the United Kingdom's ability to respond to the terrorist threat. The armed forces make an important contribution in support of the police through their specialist skills and capabilities.

Following the attacks on 11 September, as part of the Government's wider assessment of the implications for the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Defence undertook a detailed review of its contribution to home defence, based on the principles outlined in the Strategic Defence Review of 1998. The result was the SDR New Chapter, published in July this year. This outlined enhancements to the command structure for provision of support to the civil authorities and proposals for an enhanced role for the Reserves.

The SDR New Chapter reaffirmed the need to take the fight to the enemy overseas to prevent, deter and disrupt attacks, but it also recognised the need to be better prepared to respond to a threat to the United Kingdom itself. Since 11 September 2001, we have improved our capability to intercept renegade aircraft

and shipping, and refined our response to incidents involving the use of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear devices.

Anti-tank Missiles

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the findings of the search for the anti-tank missiles lost in the Bristol Channel. [78741]

Dr. Moonie: The Royal Navy Southern Diving Group's search report is currently being finalised. When it has been completed I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Low Flying

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints have been received from residents of Dumfries and Galloway by his Department in respect of low flying sorties by the RAF in each of the last five years. [78737]

Dr. Moonie: The number of complaints recorded by the Ministry of Defence Low Flying Complaints and Enquiries Unit over the last five years, from residents of Dumfries and Galloway, is shown in the table.

	Number of complaints recorded
Calendar year	
1997	184
1998	177
1999	192
Training year[1]	
1999–2000	197
2000–01	156
2001–02	161

[1] From 1999, recorded by training year from 1 April to 31 March.

Machrihanish Airport

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to shorten the runway at Machrihanish airport. [78833]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has no plans physically to shorten the runway at Machrihanish. However, we have required Highlands and Islands Airways Ltd. to use a shorter runway in compliance with the terms of their current lease.

Military Airspace

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes to designated military airspace will be implemented following the closure of West Freugh airfield. [78735]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

No decisions have yet been taken about changes to the use of airspace when the airfield closes.

Military Low Flying Training

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low flying training sorties have been flown over Dumfries and Galloway by the RAF in each of the last five years. [78738]

Dr. Moonie: Information on military low flying training in the United Kingdom low flying system is recorded for each low flying area (LFA) in the form of number of hours booked for the aircraft of all three services. Data for Dumfries and Galloway are incorporated in the total for LFA 16, which also includes the Borders region of southern Scotland and other countries up to and including those within the central belt. Figures quoted in the table indicate the number of hours low flying training has been booked by day and night in the LFA over the last five years.

	Total	*Fixed-wing*	*Helicopters*
Calendar year			
1997	4,023	3,455	568
1998	3,680	2,946	734
1999	3,544	2,843	701
Training year[1]			
1999–2000	3,408	2,830	578
2000–01	3,735	2,939	796
2001–02	4,080	3,279	801

[1] From 1999, recorded by training year from 1 April to 31 March

Note:
The figure for 2001–02 is some 13.5 per cent. lower than that recorded for 1995.

Military Medical Records

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether military medical records are made available once service personnel *(a)* have completed their military service and *(b)* are deceased; and if he will make a statement. [78271]

Dr. Moonie: On leaving the armed forces, personnel are provided with a summary of their medical history (Form F Med 133—Medical History on Release from HM Forces) to give to their civilian doctor. Release of full military medical records is permitted if an individual makes a Subject Access Request to the appropriate Service Records Office. If an individual wishes to make his or her records available to other parties, such as civilian health care providers or solicitors, written consent must be given to release the records.

In respect of deceased persons, the Access to Health Records Act 1990 applies. Records are usually released only for the purposes of litigation or claims, and disclosure of these records is subject to the consent of their executors. Where there are no executors, the consent of the administrator of the estate is required.

Disclosure of medical records of deceased personnel to other Government Departments, such as to the War Pensions Agency for the purpose of establishing entitlement to War Widows' Pensions, is permitted only on a strict "need to know" basis.

Minelaying

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Royal Navy's minelaying capability is; and what types of mine are in service. [78661]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Navy has no specialist minelaying vessels although most vessels in the fleet, including submarines, could be adapted to lay mines if deemed necessary. The Royal Navy does not have any

mine stocks and has not had since 1992. Notwithstanding this, the United Kingdom retains the capability to lay mines and continues research into mine exploitation. Practice mines, used for exercises, continue to be laid in order to retain the necessary skills.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of compensation offered to service personnel of other states who participated in UK nuclear tests. [79185]

Dr. Moonie: Australian and New Zealand personnel who participated in the British nuclear test programme and who believe that they were injured or suffered a loss as a result of their participation are entitled to claim compensation from their own governments. However, the Governments of Australia and New Zealand have vigorously defended compensation claims on the grounds that particular regard was taken for the safety and welfare of test participants, and in the absence of evidence of negligence, there is no proper basis for settling the claims. I understand that no compensation has been paid to individual New Zealand veterans, but that 10 Australian veterans have secured compensation from the Australian Government.

Personnel Inquiry

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the findings of the inquiry into armed forces personnel issues. [77789]

Mr. Ingram: The current phase of the Service Personnel Process review, which I announced to the House on 17 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 277–78W is due to be completed early in the New Year. I therefore expect to be able to make an announcement about its findings in the Spring. The final phase of the review is expected to last six months, which would point to a further announcement in the Autumn.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set up a public inquiry into the health risks of the release of zinc cadmium sulphide and radio-xenon from the atomic research establishment, Harwell, by scientists from the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down, in 1961; and if he will make a statement. [78155]

Dr. Moonie: I do not consider it necessary to set up a public inquiry. In 1999, the Ministry of Defence commissioned Professor Peter Lachmann and a team of distinguished scientists to undertake an independent review of the fluorescent particle trials which occurred between 1955 and 1963, and included the four two-hour trials which also involved the release of ^{133} Xenon at Harwell in 1961. The MOD accepts the conclusion of this review, which was that "Exposure to cadmium from dissemination of zinc cadmium sulphide during the 'cold war' should not have resulted in adverse health effects in the United Kingdom population". The findings of the review are summarised in an open literature paper entitled, "The Risk to the UK Population of Zinc Cadmium Sulphide Dispersion by the MOD During the "Cold War" (Occup. Environ. Med. 2002, 59, 13–17). Additionally, the complete review can be found at www.mod.uk/publications/zinc-cadmium.

Pride of Portsmouth (Collision)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who made the decision to allow ferry ships to enter Portsmouth harbour on the 26 and 27 October in poor weather conditions; who was consulted; and if he will make a statement. [78510]

Mr. Ingram: The Queen's Harbour Master (QHM) is responsible to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence for the control of all movements within the Dockyard Port of Portsmouth in accordance with the Dockyard Port Regulation Act 1865 and the Dockyard Port of Portsmouth Order 1978. Although the weather conditions were poor they were not unusual and the duty Harbour Control Officer, acting under QHM's delegated authority and without the need for further consultation, made the decision to allow ferry movements in the harbour.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who authorised the tug boats to be used to assist after the collision of the P&O ferry Pride of Portsmouth and HMS St Albans on 27 October; who was in control of the tug boats; and if he will make a statement. [78538]

Mr. Ingram: The Queen's Harbour Master (QHM) Portsmouth always provides a tug for cross channel ferry movements in winds exceeding 30 knots. A second tug is also available if required. In this case two tugs were provided for the move and were in attendance from the harbour entrance until the ferry berthed at the Commercial Ferry Port. The tugs were under the instruction of the Master of the ferry.

RAF Communications Systems

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in equipping RAF aircraft with secure air-to-air and air-to-ground communication systems fully interoperable with similar systems in use by the United States Air Force. [78313]

Dr. Moonie: A wide range of RAF platforms are fitted with secure air-to-air and air-to-ground communications. These systems are fully interoperable with coalition forces, including the United States.

RAF Machrihanish

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military landings and take-offs were recorded at RAF Machrihanish during each of the last five years. [78731]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Menwith Hill

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many *(a)* arrests, *(b)* reports with a view to prosecution charges, *(c)* arrests *(d)* actual prosecutions and *(e)* successful prosecutions there have

been since 1996 under the (i) RAF Menwith Hill Military Land Byelaws 1996 and (ii) the RAF Fylingdales Military Land Byelaws 1986; [77767]

(2) what the cost to his Department is of *(a)* the new security developments to the main entrance to RAF Menwith Hill and *(b)* the road development and road widening to the main entrance to Menwith Hill; [77768]

(3) how many breaches of security, in each year since 2000, there have been at *(a)* RAF Menwith Hill, *(b)* RAF Fylingdales, *(c)* RAF Lakenheath, *(d)* RAF Molesworth, *(e)* Barford St. John, *(f)* RAF Croughton and *(g)* RAF Fairford; and if he will make a statement. [77770]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested for RAF Menwith Hill is shown in the table.

	Arrests	*Reports with a view to prosecution*
1996–97	17	17
1997–98	49	49
1998–99	30	30
1999–2000	32	32
2000–01	5	5
2001–02	7	7
2002–03 to date	4	4

The records held in respect of RAF Fylingdales only go as far back as 1997–98 and indicate 11 arrests and two reports with a view to prosecution in financial year 2000–01. Prosecutions are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General.

The number of incursions recorded against the Ministry of Defence installations indicated in the previous table are shown in the following table:

Number of incursions	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03 to date*
RAF Menwith Hill	1	1	1
RAF Fylingdales	1	0	0
RAF Lakenheath	1	0	[1]10
RAF Molesworth	2	3	1
Barford St. John	1	1	0
RAF Croughton	4	3	0
RAF Fairford	1	1	0

[1] This figure relates to incursions that took place on 6 October 2002 during a large demonstration at RAF Lakenheath.

There was no cost to the MOD in respect of the works carried out at Menwith Hill. The cost was funded by the United States authorities.

RAF Squadrons

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF squadrons have their full complement of *(a)* pilots and *(b)* ground crews; which squadrons do not have a full complement of (i) pilots, (ii) ground crew; and if he will make a statement. [78270]

Mr. Ingram: On 25 October 13 RAF front line fixed and rotary wing squadrons had their full complement of pilots and 20 had a full complement of ground crew.

The following front line squadrons did not have a full complement of pilots: 1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 25, 27, 28, 31, 33, 43, 101, 111, 216 and 230.

The following front line squadrons did not have a full complement of ground crew 7, 8, 18, 23, 25, 27, 28, 28, 33, 47, 70, 216 230.

RAF manning shortfalls are well known and are being addressed. The RAF continues to meet its operational commitments.

Rapid Deployment Force

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the US Administration regarding NATO's plans to set up a rapid deployment force unit; and if he will make a statement. [77810]

Mr. Hoon: I discussed the proposal for a NATO Response Force (NRF) with the United States Secretary of Defence and other NATO colleagues at the informal meeting of defence ministers in Warsaw in September 2002. The proposed NRF concept is coherent with current work to reform NATO's command and force structures and enjoys the United Kingdom's strong support. Work is now under way within NATO to develop the NRF concept, and guiding principles are expected to be put before Heads of State and Government at the Prague summit for their agreement.

Refit Intervals

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy of refit intervals for Royal Navy warships. [78659]

Mr. Ingram: The policy of refit intervals seeks to achieve a satisfactory balance between resources and operational requirements. In general terms, such refits will occur after eight to 12 years for submarines, up to 10 years for major surface ships and one to eight years for minor surface ships.

Submarine Sonar

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research he has undertaken into the effects of submarine sonar on the behaviour and health of cetaceans; and if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the research. [78625]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is undertaking a range of research projects into the effects of both submarine and surface ship sonar on the behaviour and health of cetaceans. This research is intended to inform the Ministry of Defence's conduct of Environment Appraisals and Environmental Impact Assessments, as required by the Secretary of State for Defence's Policy Statement of 7 July 2000 on the Management of Safety and Environmental Protection in the Ministry of Defence. That Policy Statement requires Environmental Impact Assessments to be conducted for all new equipment projects. A copy of the Policy Statement, together with a chapter on the conduct of Environmental Appraisal and Environmental Impact Assessment, can be found in the Ministry of Defence's Environmental Manual, JSP 418 which is in the Library of the House.

The reason for the research programme is that, to date, it has not been possible to put forward any definitive conclusions on the effects of differing acoustic energy on marine mammals. The research, which is on-going, has not yet reached any conclusion. In addition to the research, Environmental Impact Assessments undertaken by the Ministry of Defence in respect of this subject will also be informed by evidence from leading experts both in the United Kingdom and the United States. We are also monitoring relevant scientific and environmental research around the globe on this issue.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to monitor the effects on cetaceans of the use of sonar in anti-submarine warfare operations. [78628]

Dr. Moonie: It is Ministry of Defence policy to consider the effects of sonar use on cetaceans. An environmental impact assessment is undertaken prior to all new projects and training activities. The way in which the equipment is then used during each subsequent training activity takes the assessment into account. Trials are preceded by a detailed environmental study of the operating area concerned. The operating area continues to be monitored while the trials are under way, and the activity is managed to minimize the potential impacts on cetaceans. Mitigation methods based on best scientific advice, such as acoustic and visual monitoring in accordance with Government and Joint Nature Conservation Committee published guidelines adapted for military use, are used so that the activity will be modified, delayed or moved as necessary.

These measures provide a balance between the requirement for essential trials work and training, and the equally important need to avoid causing any significant adverse effect on the marine environment.

Suicide Prevention

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the rank of officer is who is responsible for suicide prevention at *(a)* Deepcut Barracks, Surrey and *(b)* Catterick Barracks, Yorkshire. [78794]

Mr. Ingram: The responsibility for the welfare of recruits, including the identification of those who may be vulnerable to self-harm, rests with the entire chain of command. All staff are aware of the need to identify those who may be vulnerable and an army suicide prevention pamphlet, issued in January 2001, is widely available through the chain of command.

Soldiers are encouraged to discuss any issues of concern and may seek advice from a number of individuals including their immediate superiors, the regimental medical office, Padre, unit welfare officer, Local Army Welfare Worker or Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) welfare officer. WRVS staff are concentrated at the army's training establishments and provide regular, informal contact with recruits. Regular case conferences are held by these agencies to identify any soldiers who may be particularly vulnerable.

If a soldier wishes to remain entirely anonymous they may ring the army's confidential support line, which has been in operation since December 1997 under the guidance of the Samaritans. Telephone charges are free to the caller from anywhere in the world and the line is widely publicised throughout the army community.

UN Global Ceasefire

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to ensure the observance of the UN annual day of global ceasefire; [79158]

(2) what measures he took to ensure that Britain's armed forces observed the UN global ceasefire on 21 September; [79164]

(3) if he will list *(a)* the countries in which British armed forces are stationed and *(b)* those countries in which British armed forces observed the UN global ceasefire of 21 September 2001; [79157]

(4) what instructions were received by his Department on the observance of the United Nation's International Peace One Day. [79163]

Mr. Ingram: In 2001 the United Kingdom co-sponsored GA Resolution 55/282, which fixed the International Day of Peace on 21 September each year. The primary objective of the day is to encourage parties engaged in civil war and armed conflict to allow humanitarian agencies to deliver relief and medical supplies to civilian populations. The United Kingdom continues to make an important contribution to United Nations peacekeeping efforts around the world, most notably in Sierra Leone and the Balkans.

The full details as to the countries in which British armed forces are stationed are published in "Tri-Service Publication 6, Global Location of Service Personnel", a copy of which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is intended to be taken against the *(a)* British-registered and *(b)* British-based persons listed by the UN as having violated the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises in respect of their activities in relation to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [78852]

Mr. Rammell: The United Nations Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo alleges that 12 UK companies have violated the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. We are seeking more details. We are considering a substantive response to the report's recommendations.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the activities of these UK companies and persons based in the UK which have been criticised by the UN for breaking sanctions in respect of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [78851]

Mr. Rammell: The United Nations Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of

the Congo alleges that some UK based companies and persons have breached sanctions on Zimbabwe and have supplied military equipment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are studying the report's allegations closely and are considering a substantive response to its recommendations. We will also be discussing action on these and other allegations at theUnited Nations Security Council.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigations his Department had carried out into sanctions-breaking by *(a)* UK companies and *(b)* British-based persons in respect of the supply of spare parts for British Aerospace Hawk jets of the Zimbabwe Defence Force to the Democratic Republic of Congo, prior to the publication of the UN Panel of Exports' report on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the DRC. [78855]

Mr.Rammell: The information is as follows:

(a) The recent UN Panel report on the Democratic Republic of Congo contains allegations in relation to the supply of Hawk jet spare parts. We are urgently seeking further details from the UN, and will investigate them fully.

(b) None.

Charter of Fundamental Rights

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy on the Charter of Fundamental Rights is; how the Government plans to take that policy forward; and if he will make a statement. [75039]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 23 October 2002]*: The Nice European Council agreed that the Charter of Fundamental Rights would be a political statement. As mandated by the Laeken European Council, the Convention on the Future of Europe is examining whether and, if so, how, the Charter should be included in the treaties. EU member states will take the final decision by unanimity at the Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. People need to know their rights and the EU institutions need to respect them. Our policy remains one of strong support for the charter.

Das Air

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the activities of Das Air. [78845]

Mr. Rammell: The United Nations Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo lists a number of companies, including Das Air which it considers to have violated the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. We are seeking further details from the UN. We are studying the report's allegations closely and we are considering a substantive response to the report's recommendations.

European Union Officials (Salaries)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a break down of salaries of officials of the European Commission by *(a)* pay grade and *(b)* number. [78115]

Mr. MacShane: The following is a breakdown of the number of staff at each grade (top figure in cell) and their relative monthly salaries (bottom figure) within the Commission. Salaries are given in euros. Echelons are the individual pay steps within each grade.

Grade	*Echelons*								*Total number of staff*
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	
A1	1	8	7	14	11	20			61
	11,940.71	12,575.01	13,209.31	13,843.61	14,477.91	15,112.21			
A2	17	37	29	31	46	63			223
	10,596.40	11,201.67	11,806.94	12,412.21	13,017.48	13,622.75			
A3	36	58	79	103	111	101	49	117	654
	8,775.74	9,305.18	9,834.62	10,364.06	10,893.5	11,422.94	11,952.38	12,481.82	
A4	38	115	198	242	325	276	221	453	1,868
	7,372.55	7,785.79	8,199.03	8,612.27	9,025.51	9,438.75	9,851.99	10,265.23	
A5	134	252	444	411	229	166	95	119	1,850
	6,078.30	6,438.40	6,798.50	7,518.70	7,518.70	7,878.80	8,238.90	8,599.00	
A6	160	394	453	308	127	42	19	15	1,518
	5,250.79	5,539.39	5,825.99	6,112.59	6,399.19	6,685.79	6,972.39	7,258.99	
A7	449	254	433	302	93	57			1,588
	4,521.59	4,746.58	4,971.57	5,196.56	5,421.55	5,646.54			
A8	145	57							202
	3,998.94	4,160.21							
B1	9	34	72	143	137	102 6,685.79	82	229	808
	5,252.79	5,539.39	5,825.99	6,112.59	6,399.19		6,972.39	7,258.99	
B2	40	143	151	179	128	122	65	56	884
	4,551.14	4,764.51	4,977.88	5,191.25	5,404.62	5,617.99	5,831.36	6,044.73	
B3	47	192	232	244	184	102	54	37	1,092
	3,817.46	3,994.88	4,172.3	4,349.72	4,527.14	4,704.56	4,881.98	5,059.40	
B4	25	191	309	268	95	45	19	22	974
	3,301.76	3,455.62	3,609.48	3,763.34	3,917.20	4,071.06	4,224.92	4,378.78	
B5	422	39	142	150					757
	2,951.34	3,075.85	3,200.36	3,324.87					
C1	1	5	15	59	209	222	198,	910,	1,619
	3,367.66	3,503.46	3,639.26	3,775.06	3,910.86	4,046.66	4,182.46	4,318.26	
C2		1	18	99	223	292	290	390	1,313
	2,929.16	3,053.61	3,178.06	3,302.51	3,426.96	3,551.41	3,675.86	3,800.31	

Grade	Echelons 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total number of staff
C3	6	33	181	364	344	241	128	123	1,420
	2,732.35	2,838.97	2,945.59	3,052.21	3,158.83	3,265.45	3,372.07	3,478.69	
C4	11	178	455	401	228	56	17	125	1,471
	2,468.89	2,568.90	2,668.91	2,768.92	2,868.93	2,968.94	3,068.95	3,168.96	
C5	409	17	256	183					865
	2,276.47	2,369.75	2,463.03	2,556.31					
D1	1		1	13	33	50	111	253	462
	2,572.75	2,685.24	2,797.73	2,910.22	3,022.71	3,135.20	3,247.69	3,360.18	
D2		3	6	53	56	43	11	15	187
	2,345.85	2,445.76	2,545.67	2,645.58	2,745.49	2,845.40	2,945.31	3,045.22	
D3	23	1	16	50	22	7		1	120
	2,183.87	2,276.82	2,370.27	2,463.72	2,557.17	2,650.62	2,744.07	2,837.52	
L3	1	1	2	2	12	8	12	7	45
	8,775.74	9,305.18	9,834.62	10,364.06	10,893.5	11,422.94	11,952.38	12,481.82	
L4	2	12	20	53	98	91	95	157	528
	7,372.55	7,785.79	8,199.03	8,612.27	9,025.51	9,438.75	9,851.99	10,265.23	
L5	2	53	106	113	65	50	30	36	455
	6,078.30	6,438.40	6,798.50	7,158.60	7,518.70	7,878.80	8,238.90	8,599.00	
L6	73	84	116	77 6,112.59	23	4	2		379
	5,252.79	5,539.39	5,825.99		6,399.19	6,685.79	6,972.39	7,258.99	
L7	105	105	84	43	20	3			360
	4,521.59	4,746.58	4,971.57	5,196.56	5,421.55	5,646.54			
L8	41	23							64
	3,998.94	4,160.21							
Total full and part time staff									21,767

Firefighters' Strike

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what preparations he has made to ensure the safety and continuity of service to the public in the event of a firefighters' strike. [77667]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Raynsford) on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 527W.

Ipternational Criminal Court

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 21 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 38W, on the International Criminal Court, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the United States on a bilateral agreement with the United States regarding the exemption of US citizens from the ICC. [78800]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had a number of discussions with US Secretary Powell about the US Government's request for a bilateral agreement under Article 98.2 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in the period leading up to the GAER Council on 30 September. On 17 October, and as part of a tour of four EU capitals, US officials visited London for discussions with FCO officials. Those discussions were of an exploratory nature: the British side explained that HMG was ready to respond, within the parameters of the Guiding Principles agreed by EU Foreign Ministers at GAERC on 30 September. No date has yet been set for further discussion.

Iran/Iraq (Military Conflict)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Iranian Government regarding possible military action against Iraq. [78440]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: While in Iran on 9 October my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed a number of regional issues, including the threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, which have in the past been used against Iran. Both sides agreed on the need for Iraq to comply with its obligations under UN resolutions.

Moscow Theatre Siege

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he has *(a)* sought and *(b)* received that the gas used by the Russian authorities was not in violation of the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention. [78568]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Following inquiries by the United Kingdom and others, Russian authorities have announced that the gas used in ending the siege on a Moscow theatre, on Saturday 26 October, was based on Fentanyl, an opium based narcotic. Fentanyl is not a chemical scheduled under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Non-scheduled chemicals are not in themselves prohibited under the Convention for use in law enforcement, including domestic riot control purposes. On 30 October, the Russian Health Minister, Mr. Shevchenko said "I officially declare that chemical substances of the kind banned under international conventions on chemical weapons were not used".

Namibia

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received about the Namibian Government's plans to pass emergency legislation to make it illegal for foreigners to own land; what his Department's policy is; what plans he has to discuss these issues with *(a)* his European counterparts and *(b)* members of the Southern African Development Community; and if he will make a statement. [78805]

Mr. Rammell: We understand that the Namibian Government are considering an amendment to the 1995 Land Reform Bill. We are seeking urgent clarification. EU Heads of Mission in Windhoek are drawing up a report on land reform, and the issue will be discussed within the EU framework. We will if necessary also raise the issue during contact with SADC members.

New Zealand

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of the reports compiled by the secondee from Barrow International to the British Consulate in Auckland, New Zealand in 2001 into export opportunities in the New Zealand marine industry for British companies. [78153]

Mr. Rammell: The report to which I believe the hon. Member is referring was produced in May 2000. I have today asked for the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Pakistan

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit Pakistan. [78870]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no immediate plans to visit Pakistan. He has visited the country three times in the last 12 months. I hope to be able to visit in the months to come.

Private Sector Secondments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the standard contract letter which is drawn up between his Department and secondees from private companies before they start their secondment. [78152]

Mr. Rammell: There are two standard contract letters—one with the secondee and one with the seconding company. I have today asked for these to be placed in the Library of the House.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are taken to prevent conflicts of interest involving secondees from the private sector to British embassies. [78157]

Mr. Rammell: The potential for conflicts of interest is addressed when BTI and the FCO consider candidates for secondment opportunities and when setting up the secondments themselves. There are two letters of appointment: one with the secondee, and one with the seconding organisation. Both cover this issue. The letter to the secondee states:

> "It is a prime condition of the secondment that you ensure that in the course of official duties there will be no conflict of interest that will cause either embarrassment to, or difficulties for, your parent organisation (Company) or the FCO. You will be expected to ensure that your position here is not, and raises no reasonable suspicion of being, abused either in your own personal interest, or in the interests of (Company). In practise this means that you should not undertake any work or research on behalf of (Company), or present yourself as a representative of the company, for the duration of the secondment. In addition, (Company) should not have priority access to information or sales leads you secure in your work with the (Post), but should receive this information at the same time as all other British companies operating in the market or sector. Any areas of work that might possibly give rise to conflict of interest should be discussed with your line manager. Please be aware that if any of these guidelines are breached, British Trade International reserves the right to consider immediate termination of the secondment."

The letter to the seconding organisation states:

> "I trust (Company) will appreciate and share our concerns that, in the course of (Name) official duties with the FCO, there should be no conflict of interest that would, or might be, a source of embarrassment either to your company or the Department. In practise this means that (Name) should not undertake any work or research on behalf of (Company), or present himself/herself as a representative of the company, for the duration of the secondment. In addition, (Company) should not have priority access to information or sales leads secured in the course of (Name) work with the Embassy, but should receive this information at the same time as all other British companies operating in the market or sector. Please be aware that if any of these guidelines are breached, British Trade International reserves the right to consider immediate termination of the secondment. In addition, may I particularly draw your attention to paragraph vi of the attached letter."

I have arranged for a copy of both letters to be placed in the Library of the House.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of the reports compiled by the secondee from British Nuclear Fuels following his secondment to the British embassy in Sweden between September 1999 and February 2000 to review the energy market in that country and identify opportunities for UK companies. [78158]

Mr. Rammell: I have today asked for this report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent in recruiting staff to his Department in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south east in each year since 1997. [78563]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office recruits nationally. We do not, therefore break down the recruitment budget by region. The following figures include money spent on recruitment in its widest sense. This includes general marketing via careers fairs, as well as targeted marketing aimed at under-represented groups such as minority ethnic communities and women.

Financial year	£
1997–98	995,293
1998–99	1,622,811
1999–2000	1,999,803
2000–01	2,543,387
2001–02	2,791,659
2002–03	[1]1,501,626

[1] To date

Soviet Polar Region Medal

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will grant veterans the right to receive and wear the Soviet Polar Region Medal. [79066]

Mr. Straw: My Department has received no formal request from the Russian Government asking that permission be granted to issue the Defence of the Soviet Arctic Region Medal (also referred to as the Polar Region Medal) to British Veterans. Were the Russian authorities formally to ask for this campaign medal officially to be recognised in this country, the matter would be carefully considered, as are similar requests from foreign governments.

Turkey

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is for a date for Turkey to join the EU. [78867]

Mr. MacShane: The British Government looks forward to Turkey's membership of the European Union as soon as possible. Turkey has not started accession negotiations because it does not yet meet the Copenhagen political criteria, which include rule of law, democracy and respect for human rights and minorities.

We welcome the significant EU-related reforms that the Turkish Parliament has passed this year. As the Brussels European Council agreed, this has brought forward the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey. Brussels also encouraged Turkey to pursue its reform process and take further concrete steps in the direction of implementation.

UK-owned Equipment

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the Governments of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman concerning the operation of UK-owned and operated equipment of Israeli origin from their territories. [78464]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I do not know of any such discussions.

Visa Offices

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the opening of visas offices in *(a)* Jallander, *(b)* Ahamedblad and *(c)* Lahore. [78871]

Mr. Rammell: We intend to open offices in Jalandhar and Ahmedabad to make our visa services more accessible to our customers and to provide them with the advice they need. The offices will also act as visa application centres, forwarding completed applications to the relevant visa issuing post for consideration. We are also exploring the possibility of offering similar services in other cities in India.

Given the security situation in Pakistan, there is no current plan to reopen the visa operation in Lahore.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations his Department has received concerning the non-payment of pensions *(a)* by the Zimbabwe Government to British citizens and *(b)* to former British citizens in Zimbabwe; and what discussions he has had concerning the non-payment of pensions by the Government of Zimbabwe. [77943]

Mr. Rammell: The FCO has replied to 20 letters from hon. Members and five from members of the public between June and September this year concerning non-payment of Zimbabwe civil service or company pensions to British citizens in the UK and overseas. We have also answered five written PQs since February this year.

Responsibility for the payment of these pensions rests with the Zimbabwean authorities and the relevant pension fund managers. We regularly remind the Zimbabwean pension authorities of their responsibility to pay the pensions of those resident outside Zimbabwe in full and on time.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Fruit Scheme

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been spent on the National Fruit Scheme by the National Opportunities Fund in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 to date, broken down by region. [78387]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* £42 million is available under the New Opportunities Fund National School Fruit programme. Grants are being awarded through an allocation process. 27 areas have been allocated funds in phase 1 of the programme and these projects started in the summer term 2002. Further allocations will be announced during 2002 and 2003.

The amount awarded to each of the 27 areas under phase 1 of the National School Fruit programme is set out in the table.

Lead organisation	*Amount of grant award (£)*
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	180,460.00
Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS Trust (Teaching)	10,167,600.00
Education Bradford	93,220.00
London Borough of Brent	103,800.00
Northamptonshire Heartlands Primary Care Trust	62,100.00
Cornwall County Council	104,060.00
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust	136,540.00
City and Hackney Primary Care Trust	130,792.00
Enfield Primary Care Trust	155,980.00
West Hull Primary Care Trust	59,860.00
Lambeth Primary Care Trust	109,340.00
Hinckley and Bosworth Primary Care Trust	111,580.00
Luton Primary Care Trust	164,860.00
Manchester City Council	152,100.00
Central Liverpool Primary Care Trust	119,220.00
Nottingham City Primary Care Trust	122,580.00

Lead organisation	Amount of grant award (£)
Portsmouth City Council	129,300.00
Plymouth Primary Care Trust	144,444.00
Sheffield West Primary Care Trust	150,340.00
Slough Borough Council	158,700.00
Barnsley Primary Care Trust	82,792.00
North Tees Primary Care Trust	124,860.00
Newcastle Primary Care Trust	153,180.00
Wakefield West Primary Care Trust	110,340.00
Halton Borough Council	90,900.00
Newham Primary Care Trust	102,792.00
Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust	94,792.00

Football Commission

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what *(a)* recent discussions she has had with and *(b)* representations she has received regarding the Independent Football Commission; and if she will make a statement; [78889]

(2) what research *(a)* has been conducted and *(b)* is planned by her Department on the Independent Football Commission; and if she will place the related documentation in the Library. [78888]

Mr. Caborn: The Independent Football Commission was launched in March. In addition to its work in considering individual complaints from supporters, the Commission has already considered issues of racism, merchandising, broadcasting, and the treatment of away supporters. The Commission's success in establishing itself and meeting its initial objectives will be considered in its first annual report, which is due to be published in January 2003. In advance of that report, the Government does not see a need for separate research into the Commission's activities.

I have received one representation on the subject of the Commission since its launch. My Department has, however, drawn the attention of correspondents to it where this is appropriate. I met the Commission's Chairman, Professor Derek Fraser, on 30 April, and will meet him again on 7 January to discuss progress.

Lottery Funds (Village Halls)

Mr Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many representations she has received about the case for village halls to win an appropriate share of Lottery funds; and if she will make a statement. [78444]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received numerous representations from Members of Parliament, village halls advisers and others about the funding difficulties facing village halls. Many village halls have received Lottery funding and the community fund alone has to date awarded £109 million for the building, extension and improvement of 2,271 village halls.

We have asked Lottery distributors to work together to make it easier for community groups to access such funding. Last month distributors launched a £2 million trial programme in the West Midlands involving a shared application process for groups seeking up to £100,000 to improve their community building and the sports, arts or community activities that happen there.

National Lottery Funding

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will issue guidance to direct more funds from the National Lottery receipts to support projects for youth and young people, including the uniformed organisations, which create more facilities and organised opportunities designed to remove young people from the streets. [78479]

Mr. Caborn: The Government has issued policy directions to Lottery distributing bodies which include a requirement to take into account the needs of children and young people in distributing Lottery funds. This summer, 11.5m from the New Opportunities Fund went directly towards diversionary activities for young people to help reduce street crime. We are currently consulting on the future of Lottery distribution and a dedicated Youth Fund is among the options proposed.

New Opportunities Fund

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent of the New Opportunities Fund on PE and sports in schools in rural England in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 to date. [78405]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 31 October 2002]*: The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) has allocated funding to each LEA area to ensure that funding is available for projects in all parts of England. These allocations are made up of a baseline allocation (based on the size of the school population in the LEA) and a deprivation allocation (based on the levels of deprivation within the LEA).

Out of the £581.25 million available under the New Opportunities for PE and Sport programme in England, NOF has committed around £83 million to date.

Figures are not readily available in the format requested, but rural communities have benefited from the awards made to date, and will continue to benefit from this programme in the future.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations have been made to her by the Scottish Executive on the operation of the New Opportunities Fund in Scotland. [78733]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a number of representations from the Scottish Executive about the New Opportunities Fund's operations in Scotland. The most recent of these concerned the future allocation of NOF funding in Scotland.

Olympics World Games

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she will take to support the UK delegation at the Dublin Sspecial Olympics world games. [78887]

Mr. Caborn: As the Special Olympics is a grassroots sporting event the United Kingdom delegation does not qualify for specific funding from either Sport England or UK Sport. I understand that in previous years the Special Olympics has canvassed for support from many organisations without relying on any one block grant.

My right hon Friend the Prime Minister has recently provided a message of support for the Special Olympics "Support an Athlete" fundraising initiative. "Support an Athlete" will be launched in January 2003 and will provide companies, individuals and schools with the opportunity to sponsor an athlete or an entire delegation for the duration of the Games. The monies raised will cover all costs involved in hosting the delegations during their two week stay, and includes food, transport, insurance and entertainment for that period.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensioner Poverty

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received on pensioner poverty. [75897]

Maria Eagle: We regularly receive representation from a variety of sources regarding our policies for tackling pensioner poverty. In addition both Ministers and Officials meet regularly with organisations that represent older people to discuss a range of issues of mutual interest.

Benefit Payments

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what measures his Department has taken to prevent pensions and benefits claimants with *(a)* learning disabilities and *(b)* registered sight loss from being penalised following the introduction of Automatic Credit Transfer; [76934]

(2) what funds have been allocated by his Department to prevent pensions and benefits claimants with *(a)* learning disabilities and *(b)* registered sight loss from being penalised following the introduction of Automatic Credit Transfer. [76935]

Malcolm Wicks: Many people in these circumstances already opt to be paid directly into their bank account. After April 2003 many others will be able to benefit from the greater flexibility that payment by automated credit transfer offers in terms of when and where they collect their money.

The new service is being designed with the needs of all customers in mind. Banks are making their basic accounts accessible at the Post Office. The Post Office is developing a post office card account which is a simple account just for the receipt of benefit, pension and tax credit payments. As is now the case with orderbooks and girocheques, customers can, if they wish, nominate someone else to collect their money for them. In these cases a second card will be issued.

Our information campaign will take customers through the changes that are being made to the way benefits and pensions are paid. Customers will be supplied with information which clearly sets out their account options including a leaflet which outlines the features of each type of account. This will help customers to decide which account best meets their needs and circumstances.

There have been no specific funds allocated to this group of claimants as the Government are confident that a service will be in place to ensure they will not be disadvantaged.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps will be taken to assist people in hospitals or otherwise unable to get to banks because of illness to collect pensions from source after January 2003. [77095]

Malcolm Wicks: As with orderbooks and girocheques now, customers would need to give someone else access to their account. The precise arrangement would depend on which type of account they have. For those with a current account there are a number of well established options which include Power of Attorney arrangements, third party mandate with the bank or provide another person with a signed letter of authority. Those with a post office card account will be able to nominate someone else to access their account through a second card.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason the Post Office has issued guidance but it will not advise customers on the best route for the payment of benefits after January 2003. [77096]

Malcolm Wicks: It would not be appropriate for post office or Government staff to provide detailed financial advice, including which type of account people should open. The Government will make clear in its literature what options are available to customers. This literature will mention the option of continuing to collect money at a post office branch and the availability of the post office card account. The Post Office will also be able to supply information on banking at post offices. This will enable customers to decide which account best meets their needs and circumstances.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 24 July, *Official Report*, column 1570W, on incapacity reviews, what the findings were of the previous studies of sample cases. [77247]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The only previous study of a sample of cases was carried out in 1996 and found that on average the whole medical assessment process took 15.9 weeks where entitlement was confirmed and 17.7 weeks where benefit was withdrawn.

Adult Disadvantage

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment he has made of the incidence of ageism in the workplace; and if he will make a statement; [76961]

(2) what steps he is taking to discourage ageism in the workplace; and if he will make a statement. [76962]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have made a pledge to tackle age discrimination and we are committed to introducing age legislation covering employment, vocational training and guidance by 2006.

We have been vigorously promoting the benefits of age diversity and recruitment, training and retaining of older workers to employers through our Age Positive campaign. The campaign focuses on raising employers' awareness of the business case for an age diverse work force and encouraging them to use the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment to inform their employment policies. The campaign features a range of initiatives to promote age diversity, which are shown on our website www.agepositive.gov.uk.

The Code of Practice, published in June 1999, sets out the standards for non-ageist approaches to recruitment, training, promotion, redundancy and retirement, and was developed with leading organisations including the CBI, TUC, the Employers Forum on Age and Age Concern. Evaluation of the Code of Practice, published last year, found that the number of companies using age in recruitment had fallen from 27 per cent. to 13 per cent. and those companies with a policy against employing older people has halved from 14 per cent. to 7 per cent. However it also indicated that 90 per cent. of people believe that employers do discriminate against older workers and although age awareness had increased considerably over the evaluation period, smaller employers were least likely to have realised the implications of ageism.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his Department's policy is towards ageism in the workplace. [77855]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* We have made a pledge to tackle age discrimination and we are committed to introducing age legislation covering employment, vocational training and guidance by 2006.

We are already encouraging employers to adopt non-ageist employment practices through our Age Positive Campaign. The campaign raises employers' awareness of the business benefits of an age diverse work force and encourages a flexible approach to retirement to open up choice and opportunity for individuals to stay in work longer.

In 1999 we published the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment which sets out the standards for non-ageist approaches to recruitment, training, promotion, redundancy and retirement. The code was developed with leading organisations including the CBI, TUC, the Employers Forum on Age and Age Concern. Evaluation shows that from 1999 to 2001 the number of companies using age in recruitment had already fallen from 27 per cent. to 13 per cent. and the number of companies having a policy against employing older workers had dropped from 14 per cent. to 7 per cent.

Older workers have a wealth of skills and experience that can benefit individual businesses and the economy as a whole. Our policies will help to improve further the employment rate of people over 50, which has risen considerably since 1997.

Benefit Fraud

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the overall cost of *(a)* benefits fraud and *(b)* the agencies and actions taken to discover, prevent and prosecute benefit fraud in the last year for which figures are available. [78469]

Malcolm Wicks: Our latest estimate is that around £2 billion is lost annually through benefit fraud in Great Britain.

The overall aim of the Department's anti-fraud strategy is to have a benefit system, which is secure from first claim to final payment. The implementation of this strategy means that an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of all staff in the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments. It is therefore not possible to identify separately the cost involved in tackling benefit fraud across the Department and its Agencies.

Backdated Benefits

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money he estimates has been saved by the government since the rules for backdating of benefits were changed. [76976]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available.

Benefit Rates

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will raise the benefit rates for working age adults. [79205]

Malcolm Wicks: We keep all benefit rates under continuous review. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make an announcement in due course about the proposed rates of benefit which will apply from April 2003.

Employment Agencies

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list his Department's employment agencies operating in Stoke on Trent. [76661]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus has the following offices within the boundaries of the Stoke-on-Trent local authority area:

Hanley Jobcentre

Burslem Jobcentre

Longton Jobcentre

Stoke Jobcentre

Hanley Social Security Office

Longton Social Security Office

Firefighters' Strike

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what preparations he has made to ensure the safety and continuity of service to the public in the event of a firefighters' strike; and what the cost is to the Department of these actions. [77655]

Malcolm Wicks: We have put in place procedures to review internal contingency plans and evacuation procedures to ensure the safety of both the Departments staff and its customers. The cost of providing emergency cover will depend on the extent and nature of any industrial action.

Health and Safety Commission

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the change in the number of fatal injuries in the construction industry in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [75132]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There were 113 fatal injuries in the construction industry including workers and members of the public, in 2000–01. The Health and Safety Executive's provisional figures for 2001–02 show that there were 85 fatal injuries to workers and members of the public for the corresponding period.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many inspectors, excluding trainees, are employed by the Field Operations Division of the Health and Safety Executive in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Yorkshire and the North East, *(c)* the North West, *(d)* the Midlands, *(e)* Wales and the West, *(f)* London and the South East and *(g)* the Home Counties; and if he will make a statement. [75138]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of inspectors, excluding trainees, employed by the Field Operations Directorate (FOD) of the Health and Safety Executive on 17 October 2002 is:

Division	*Number of inspectors*
Scotland	80
Yorkshire and North East	85
North West	75
Midlands	106
Wales and South West	75
London	44
East and South East	97
Construction	148
Total	710

The information is not available in the format requested. This reflects the re-organisation which took effect on 8 April 2002.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many companies have been fined for failure to insure their liability to their employees in the event of injury or disease sustained in the course of their employment in each year since 1997. [75849]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of employers who have been fined by courts in England, Scotland and Wales for failure to have insurance cover as required by the Employer's Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 and the Employer's Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Regulations 1998 each year since 1997 is as follows:

1997—7
1998—1
1999—4
2000—1
2001—12

Housing Benefit

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average level of rent paid through housing benefit to private sector tenants in Islington was in each of the past three years; and what the average rent charged to the tenants concerned was. [76330]

Malcolm Wicks: *[holding answer 22 October 2002]:* The table shows the average weekly Housing Benefit payment and the average rent eligible for Housing Benefit for tenants living in the deregulated private sector, in the London Borough of Islington, at May 2000, 2001 and 2002. There is no directly comparable information about the actual rents paid by tenants.

£

	Average weekly amount of Housing Benefit paid	*Average weekly eligible rent*
May 2000	93.00	95.80
May 2001	101.80	105.60
May 2002	112.70	117.10

Notes:
1. The data refer to households claiming Housing Benefit, which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than benefit household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.
2. The eligible rent is the amount of rent which may be met by Housing Benefit after any restrictions applied by the rent officer, taking account of the cost of suitable accommodation in the area.
3. Figures include cases where Housing Benefit is paid at the reduced rate due to the tenant's income.
4. Figures exclude any extended payment cases.

Source:
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. sample inquiries taken in May 2000, 2001 and 2002.

Maternity Benefits

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to introduce improvements to *(a)* statutory maternity pay and *(b)* maternity allowance. [79586]

Maria Eagle: Regulations were laid before Parliament on 1 November which:

amend existing regulations to improve the current arrangements for Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance and;

amend existing regulations dealing with Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit which are needed to take account of measures in the Employment Act 2002 which improve maternity rights and introduce new rights to paternity pay and leave and adoption pay and leave.

These regulations are part of the package of measures developed to help working parents balance their work and family lives and significantly improve and extend the maternity payments made to pregnant and new mothers.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 24 October laid three draft Statutory Instruments which cover the improvements to maternity leave and the introduction of statutory adoption leave and pay and statutory paternity leave and pay.

Pensions

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of

the number of people required to retire from their jobs owing to reaching a certain age; and if he will make a statement. [76963]

Maria Eagle: The Department has commissioned a study to update knowledge about older workers' participation in the labour market, including the influences on their remaining in employment and the reasons for retirement. This survey of 2,800 people aged 50–69 asked people why they retired, including whether this was a result of having reached their employer's normal retirement age. The findings from this research, which is on-going, are expected to be published in spring 2003.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will supply the National Pensioners' Convention with a copy of the Government's National Strategy on Pensions; and if he will make a statement. [77040]

Maria Eagle: A copy of the UK's national strategy report on pensions was sent to the National Pensioners' Convention on 17 September.

All EU member states have produced reports as part of an exercise to exchange information and best practice on pensions. The UK report sets out current pensions policy. A draft Joint Commission/Council Report based on the information in the reports from member states is provisionally scheduled to be considered by EU Heads of State and Government at the spring European Council in 2003.

Copies of the UK report are in the Library.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 24 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 487W, on contributions to non-state pensions, if he will estimate for each four year period for *(a)* all people, *(b)* men and *(c)* women the percentage of members of each quintile group who contributed to a non-state pension in at least three out of four years. [78806]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

Percentage of working-age individuals in each quintile contributing to a non-state pension in at least three out of four years by equivalised income quintiles (20 per cent. band) (Great Britain)

	Bottom quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*All*
All						
1992–95	27	33	48	57	69	47
1993–96	27	30	48	55	66	46
1994–97	26	31	50	57	68	47
1995–98	26	36	49	57	68	48
1996–99	23	34	50	60	66	48
1997–2000	21	36	49	60	68	49
Males						
1992–95	36	48	62	72	80	59
1993–96	35	46	62	66	74	56
1994–97	35	45	63	66	76	57
1995–98	37	47	59	61	74	57
1996–99	31	45	60	68	69	56
1997–2000	31	47	58	68	70	57
Females						
1992–95	19	17	33	42	59	35
1993–96	18	14	33	45	59	35
1994–97	19	17	36	47	61	37
1995–98	17	24	37	52	62	39
1996–99	16	22	40	51	63	40
1997–2000	13	25	39	50	65	41

Notes:
1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data set. The BHPS is a longitudinal data set developed at the University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. The latest data available is for the period 1997 to 2000.
2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. The income measure used is total equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).
3. Individuals are assigned between quintiles according to their household income in the first year of each of the four year periods.

Source:
BHPS

Post Offices

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to inform benefit and tax credit claimants that they will be able to receive their entitlement in cash over the counter at the Post Office after April 2003; [76105]

(2) what plans he has to publicise the availability of the new Post Office card account. [76106]

Malcolm Wicks: Customers are being supplied with information (including letters and leaflets), which clearly sets out their 'account options'. They can choose the bank or building society account (including the Post Office card account) which best meets their needs and circumstances. All of the Department for Work and Pensions material sets out the key features of the various accounts and mentions the availability of collecting cash from the Post Office, and the Post Office card account.

The material the Inland Revenue have sent out with new Tax Credit application forms also clearly sets out the various account options, and the fact that people will still be able to collect their money from the Post Office if they wish.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 643W, on winter fuel payments, on what basis he has estimated the one-off cost of paying backdated winter fuel payments for 1997–98 to 2001–02 to British citizens living within the European Economic Area to be less than the future annual cost. [78482]

Mr. McCartney: The one-off costs quoted in my written answer on 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 643W were the administrative costs associated with the implementation of the changes.

The annual cost is the estimated on-going cost of the actual winter fuel payments. Our estimate of the first year cost of such winter fuel payments is around £21 million, which takes account of entitlement for past periods.

Fraud

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time taken by his Department's Operational Intelligence Unit to respond to requests from local benefit fraud inspectors to requests for data in suspected fraud cases under the terms of the Social Security Fraud Act has been. [74843]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Advertising

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by his Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within his Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [74682]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure that Jobcentre Plus services are available throughout rural areas. [73983]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We understand the difficulties that people living in rural areas can face, both in securing employment and gaining access to our services. We are therefore developing new ways of making Jobcentre Plus services more accessible to such people, for example by:

- providing a single point of access to jobs and benefits
- providing access to jobs through call centres, touch screen 'Jobpoints' in a wider range of locations, and the internet
- enabling people to make claims for benefit by telephone, and eventually through other channels such as the internet
- extending outreach services such as local community surgeries
- making services available through mobile units
- delivering services from premises shared with our partners in the local community, for example local authorities

We have introduced new services which should be particularly useful for Jobcentre Plus customers in rural areas. "Jobseeker Direct"—on 0845 6060234—is a telephone jobfinding service available to both unemployed and employed people. They can also look for jobs and learning opportunities on the internet, through two websites www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk and www.worktrain.gov.uk.

The integrated Jobcentre Plus offices which we will be extending throughout Great Britain over the next four years will offer a significantly enhanced telephone service that will improve access to services for those who do not live near a Jobcentre Plus office. Each Jobcentre Plus office will have a dedicated telephone contact centre open from 8.30 am to 6.00 pm. Customers will be able to make their initial claim to benefit through this service and book appointments with Personal Advisers.

Employment Initiatives

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase the *(a)* amount and *(b)* quality of support for the educational, training and employment scheme employees. [74405]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The amount and quality of support available to participants on our educational, training and employment programmes is under constant review as part of our continuous improvement agenda. This is led by Jobcentre Plus in partnership with the organisations delivering the programmes. Organisations wishing to compete for our education, training or employment related contracts are asked to set out how they intend delivering the programme, including the amount and quality of support they will offer participants. The providers who win the contracts are then subject to contractual and quality audits by Jobcentre Plus regional contracts managers, district quality management teams and, in some cases, the Adult Learning Inspectorate. These seek to ensure that providers deliver to the standards proposed in their bids and to support continuous improvement in the quality of their provision.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Food Import Inspections

Mr Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects harmonised European Union legislation will be in force covering food of non-animal origin. [75921]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that the European Commission is still preparing its proposal for a regulation on official feed and food controls which will cover, inter alia, harmonised controls for imports of food of non-animal origin. The Commission expects to submit its final proposal to the European Council in late November 2002. It is unlikely, therefore, that the Regulation will be agreed and come into force before 2004.

Recycling

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list local authorities that are *(a)* failing to meet Government recycling targets, *(b)* expected to meet them and *(c)* exceeding them; and what the estimates are for recycling in England for (i) the current year and (ii) 2003–04. [HL71110]

Mr. Meacher *[holding Answer 19 July 2002]:* Local authority Statutory Performance Standard ("targets") for recycling and composting of household waste have been set for the years 2003–04 and 2005–06. Local authorities will submit performance data against which these targets will be measured to the Audit Commission in Summer 2004 and audited performance figures will be available towards the end of 2004.

Targets for individual authorities are listed in the publication "Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies" March 2001. Copies of this document were placed within both libraries of the House on 5 March 2001. They are also published on DEFRA's website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/management/guidance/mwms/10.htm.

We will have audited recycling performance figures for 2001–02 in December 2002 and this should give us an indication of progress to targets. A document setting out individual local authorities' targets and the most recent available data for their household waste recycling rates (2000–01), set out in ascending order according to their recycling and composting rate for 2000–01, has been placed in both libraries of the House (Table A).

A further document (Table B) setting out the same information, but also including a column showing the difference between the 2000–01 rate and the 2003–04 target, in order to show "progress to target", has also been placed in both libraries of the House. Those furthest from their target in percentage points are shown at the top of the table. Note that, since all authorities had to achieve different levels of improvement to reach their target, that table does not allow for exact comparison.

We set targets in a way which means all authorities would have to improve their performance over their rate in 1998–99, no matter what their starting point. For that reason, when tracking local authorities' recycling performance, we consider how much the recycling rate has *increased,* rather than looking simply at the rate.

I have written to the leaders of the local authorities that are listed below about recycling. In these authorities, preliminary performance data for 2001–02, taken from 2002–03 Best Value Performance Plans, shows that the authority's recycling rate has decreased, stayed the same, or only increased by 1 per cent. between 1998–99 and 2001–02. I have invited the relevant leaders to identify work that is already in hand to meet their 2003–04 Statutory Performance Standard for recycling and composting of household waste and to consider the need for further action where this is relevant.

Adur District Council
Arun District Council
Aylesbury Vale District Council
Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council
Bassetlaw District Council
Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Bournemouth Borough Council
Bradford City Council
Breckland District Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Brighton & Hove Council
Broadland District Council
Broxtowe Borough Council
Cambridge County Council
Cannock Chase District Council
Carlisle City Council
Charnwood Borough Council
Christchurch Borough Council
Copeland Borough Council
Corby Borough Council
Cotswold District Council
Craven District Council
Cumbria County Council
Dartford Borough Council
Derby City Council
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
Dorset County Council
Dover District Council
Easington District Council
East Dorset District Council
East Northamptonshire District Council
East Staffordshire Borough Council
Eastbourne Borough Council
Ellesmere Port & Neston Borough Council
Elmbridge Borough Council
Exeter City Council
Fareham Borough Council
Forest of Dean District Council
Fylde Borough Council
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Gloucester City Council
Gosport Borough Council
Gravesham Borough Council
Hampshire County Council
Harrogate Borough Council

Hertsmere Borough Council
Horsham District Council
Hyndburn Borough Council
Kettering Borough Council
Kingston upon Hull City Council
Lancaster City Council
Lincoln City Council
Liverpool City Council
London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
London Borough of Barnet
London Borough of Bexley
Longon Borough of Croydon
London Borough of Ealing
London Borough of Enfield
London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
London Borough of Haringey
London Borough of Newham
London Borough of Redbridge
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
London Borough of Southwark
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Macclesfield Borough Council
Manchester City Council
Mansfield District Council
Medway Council
Mendip District Council
Mid Suffolk District Council
Mid Sussex District Council
Milton Keynes Council
Newark & Sherwood District Council
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
North Cornwall District Council
North Dorset District Council
North Kesteven District Council
North Norfolk District Council
North Shropshire District Council
North Tyneside Council
North Warwickshire Borough Council
North West Leicestershire District Council
Northampton Borough Council
Northumberland County Council
Nottingham City Council
Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council
Oadby & Wigston Borough Council
Oswestry Borough Council
Poole Borough Council
Purbeck District Council
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Rossendale Borough Council
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea
Runnymede Borough Council
Rushmoor Borough Council
Rydale District Council
Sedgemoor District Council
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Sheffield City Council
Shepway District Council
Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council
Shropshire County Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
South Bedfordshire District Council
South Kesteven District Council
South Lakeland District Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
South Somerset District Council
South Staffordshire Council
St Albans City and District Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Stockton-on-Tees Council
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Sunderland City Council
Swindon Borough Council
Tandridge District Council
Taunton Deane Borough Council
Teesdale District Council
Thanet District Council
Three Rivers District Council
Tewkesbury Borough Council
Tynedale District Council
Warwick District Council
Warwickshire County Council
Watford Council
Waveney District Council
Waverley Borough Council
West Berkshire Council
West Devon Borough Council
West Lancashire District Council
Western Riverside Waste Authority
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Worcester City Council
Worthing Borough Council.

Climate Change

Mr. Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, what progress has been made *(a)* on the Government sustainability index on climate change and *(b)* towards the Government's domestic target for a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions based on 1990 levels; and if she will make a statement. [77462]

Mr. Meacher: *(a)* The latest figures for the Headline Sustainable Development Indicator for Climate Change were published in a Defra Statistical Press Release on 28 March. Emissions on the "basket" of six greenhouse gases covered by the Kyoto Protocol, weighted by global warming potential, fell by 13.2 per cent. between the 1990 base year and 2000, the last year for which confirmed data is available. There was no change between 1999 and 2000. The UK has a target under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008–12. We remain on course to achieve this target.

(b) A provisional estimate of carbon dioxide emissions for 2001, based on energy use, was published by the Department for Trade and Industry in March in its Energy Trends publication. This estimated that carbon dioxide emissions were 154.4 million tonnes of carbon, approximately 6 per cent. below the UK's 1990 baseline emissions of 16.4 million tonnes of carbon.

Agricultural Support

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment she has made of support given to farmers in other countries to enable and encourage them to care for the environment and countryside; and if she will make a statement. [79241]

Alun Michael: Precise support arrangements vary widely between countries. Within the EU, all Member States are able to operate programmes under the Rural Development Regulation. These include agri-environment schemes which encourage farmers to adopt environmentally beneficial farming practices by compensating farmers for the costs and income foregone and by providing an incentive payment.

The Department recently received the final report of an economic evaluation of agri-environment schemes commissioned from the Centre for Rural Economics Research at the University of Cambridge. This report included a comparison of agri-environment schemes offered in other European countries. It will be published shortly and will be available on the Defra website.

All Member States submit mid-term evaluations of their rural development programmes to the European Commission at the end of 2003. The results should allow an EU-wide comparison and assessment of rural development support in general, including agri-environment support.

British Cattle Movement Service

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (1) what assessment she has made of the accuracy of data held by the BCMS; and if she will make a statement; [79281]

(2) what assessment she has made of how up to date the information held by the BCMS is; and if she will make a statement. [79320]

Alun Michael: The British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) works hard to validate and cleanse the information it is sent by cattle keepers. The information received by BCMS can often be incomplete or incorrect. The BCMS and the Paying Agencies throughout Great Britain cross check their data to confirm accuracy and identify and rectify anomalies. This is a time consuming and laborious process. The BCMS is working with partners in Government and Industry to improve the quality of the data that it receives.

Refrigerators

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many refrigerators are awaiting disposal in Essex; and how much it will cost to dispose of them. [77154]

Mr. Meacher [*holding answer 31 October 2002*]: The exact number of fridges being stored pending treatment in either waste collection authority or waste disposal authority at any one point in time are not held centrally. However, current estimates suggest there are more than 900,000 units awaiting treatment in the UK.

The initial annual UK cost is likely to be around £40 million. This will decrease as plant are commissioned, competition becomes established and more fridges that do not need treatment enter the waste stream.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Press Advertising (Devolved Posts)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many non-devolved posts were advertised in the Press in each year since June 1999; and what percentage of them were advertised in the Scottish press. [76855]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 24 October 2002]:* The information requested is not available.

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the detection of crime and to increase the numbers of criminals brought to justice. [76933]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ross Cranston) on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 626W.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's involvement with the International Organisation for Migration; and the role he expects that organisation to take in the UK. [77339]

Beverley Hughes: The United Kingdom (UK) joined the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in June 2001. This was a result of an agreement between the Home Office, the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as the UK was increasingly making use of the IOM's services, and the increasing level of work being taken forward by the Home Office in conjunction with the IOM was at odds with the United Kingdom's retaining "observer"status.

The Government funds many projects undertaken by the IOM. The IOM co-ordinates the delivery of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme for asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers.

Additionally, the UK part finances IOM projects on return and reintegration.

Furthermore, the IOM have considerable expertise in supporting the victims of people trafficking, and Home Office officials have consulted closely with the IOM in order to develop support systems for victims of trafficking.

We see IOM's assistance to be crucial to our plans for practical action against illegal migration, by working proactively beyond our borders.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the application pack for candidates for the job of Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality; and if he will make a statement on the differences between this pack and those issued to applicants for this post on previous occasions. [77431]

Beverley Hughes: I have today placed a copy of the information pack for candidates for the post of Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) in the Library.

The post of Chair was advertised for the first time in 1999. On that occasion the pack set out basic information about the CRE and the person specification. This time the information pack has been re-designed to provide additional information about the wider race equality agenda and the government's support for the work of the Commission. No new requirements have been added to the role of the Chair, but more information about the role has been included in the information pack.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those public bodies for which his Department is responsible where provision is made in the job description of the Chairman that the policies of the body be compatible with those of the Secretary of State. [77432]

Beverley Hughes: The information pack sent to candidates for the post of Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), which is currently vacant, states that:

"The Chair must ensure that the CRE's policies are compatible with those of the Secretary of State and that the Commission's affairs are conducted with probity"

The requirement is not a new one as the Commission for Racial Equality's policy and resource framework is agreed with Ministers who remain accountable to Parliament for the work and efficiency of the Commission.

To my knowledge, this particular form of words has not been used in the job descriptions sent to applicants for the post of Chair of other public bodies sponsored by the Home Office. However, all non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) agree their policy and resources framework with Ministers, and Ministers are answerable to Parliament for the policies and performance of all public bodies sponsored by their departments, including their use of resources and the policy framework within which they operate.

Asylum Applications

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum were made during each of the last three years at *(a)* Glasgow airport, *(b)* Edinburgh airport, *(c)* Rosyth port and *(d)* Stranraer port. [78497]

Beverley Hughes: Asylum applications were as follows:

Date	*Number of applications*
Glasgow airport (including Prestwick airport)	
1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000	4
1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001	20
1 January 2002 to 30 October 2002	[1] 23
Edinburgh airport	
1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000	6
1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001	16
1 January 2002 to 30 October 2002	[1] 19
Rosyth	
May 2002 to date[2]	[1] 2

Date	Number of applications
Stranraer/Cairnryan	
1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000	11
1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001	31
1 January 2002 to 30 October 2002	[1] 42

[1] Data for 2002 are from local management information and may be subject to change.

[2] The ferry service into Rosyth has only operated since May 2002.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources are available to process asylum applications at *(a)* Belfast port and *(b)* Larne port. [78504]

Beverley Hughes: No permanent resources are in place at either Belfast or Larne ports. Neither port has international ferry services and accordingly there is no operational need for UK Immigration Service personnel to be stationed there. Any person who indicated to port staff at either port that they wished to claim asylum would be directed to the UK Immigration Service office at Belfast International Airport, where arrangements would be made for screening and interview in the normal way.

Asylum Applications (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons claimed asylum during each of the last three years in Northern Ireland. [78506]

Beverley Hughes: No statistics are kept of the numbers of asylum applicants in Northern Ireland, or any other geographic region in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources are available to the Immigration Service in dealing with asylum applications made on entry to Northern Ireland from Eire. [78728]

Beverley Hughes: Any person seeking asylum in Northern Ireland is directed to the UK Immigration Service staff at Belfast International airport, where arrangements are then made for their screening and interview in the same way as a person seeking asylum elsewhere in the UK.

The Belfast office currently has 11.5 staff, part of whose duties is to screen new asylum applicants identified in Northern Ireland.

Asylum Centres

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are being used in assessing the suitability of contractors for operating the proposed new centres for asylum seekers; and who will decide on the award of contracts. [78549]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Tender documents for the design, build and operation of accommodation centres have not yet been issued to potential contractors.

In due course, the criteria to be used in evaluating bids will involve project management; legal and financial responses; design and construction; and delivery of services and maintenance. Home Office Ministers will make decisions to award contracts.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made for a full year of the cost of the withdrawal of the work concession to asylum seekers in *(a)* added benefit and *(b)* payments to detainees; and what he estimates to be the net difference in the costs to each removal centre of employing contract and agency labour in place of detainees working in cleaning and kitchens. [78484]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* We do not have figures on the additional costs, if any, of providing support to asylum seekers who can no longer seek permission to work. Internal management Information indicates that during the financial year 2001–02 we made initial decisions on the vast majority of new substantive applications within the initial six months. The number who might have been able to benefit from the concession is therefore much reduced.

The percentage of new substantive cases in 2001–02 which were decided within six months will be available from 29 November 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1 .html

The work concession for asylum seekers did not extend to asylum seekers in detention.

Immigration detainees held in Immigration Service removal centres have never been required to work nor are they expected to assist in the running of the centres.

Following their redesignation earlier this year as removal centres, the Prison Service detention facilities at Dover, Haslar and Lindholme ceased to operate under Prison Rules. As a consequence, detainees no longer had the opportunity to undertake paid employment in the centres and the practice of relying on such work for the provision of certain ancillary services came to an end. Work formerly undertaken by detainees at these centres has been contracted out or transferred to agency staff. For this year this has resulted in a net additional cost of £1.09 million. This will be met from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's budget.

Asylum Support

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* private sector contractors and *(c)* voluntary sector contractors are providing accommodation and support services for asylum seekers; and what the financial value is of tenders awarded to each sector. [78544]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The information is as follows:

	Contracts	Grant agreements
Private sector	11	—
Local authorities	11	—
Voluntary sector	—	6

Information on the financial value of contracts is not available in the form requested.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what geographical areas are covered in each region in the regional breakdown used by NASS; and what powers and responsibilities have been delegated to the individual regions. [78545]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The areas covered by each region are as follows:

Region	*County*
East of England	Norfolk
	Suffolk
	Essex
	Cambridgeshire
	Hertfordshire
	Bedfordshire
East Midlands	Derbyshire
	Nottinghamshire
	Leicestershire
	Lincolnshire
	Northamptonshire
Greater London	London
South Central and East	Dorset
	Buckinghamshire
	Oxfordshire
	Berkshire
	Hampshire
	Surrey
	West Sussex
	East Sussex
	Kent
North East	Northumberland
	Tyne and Wear
	Durham
	Cleveland
North West	Greater Manchester
	Merseyside
	Lancashire
	Cheshire
	Cumbria
Northern Ireland	County Antrim
	County Down
	County Armagh
	County Tyrone
	County Fermanagh
	County Derry
Scotland	Dumfries and Galloway
	Borders
	Lothian
	Strathclyde
	Central
	Fife
	Tayside
	Grampian
	Highland
South West	Cornwall
	Devon
	Somerset
	Avon
	Wiltshire
	Gloucestershire
Wales	Gwent
	South Glamorgan
	West Glamorgan
	Mid Glamorgan
	Dyfed
	Powys
	Clwyd
	Gwynedd
	Anglesey
West Midlands	Staffordshire
	Shropshire
	West Midlands
	Hereford and Worcester
	Warwickshire
Yorkshire and Humberside	North Yorkshire
	West Yorkshire
	South Yorkshire
	Humberside

National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is planning to increase the number of its staff in each major region. It is expected that the regional infrastructure will be in place by the end of the current financial year. Under the regionalisation programme work related to investigations, outreach and housing contract management will be delegated, with the expectation that aspects of operations work will follow at a later date. Actual locations of individual offices within regions are still being finalised.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many private contractors providing accommodation or support for asylum seekers have been dropped since 1997 because of dissatisfaction with their performance. [78546]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) became operational on 3 April 2000. Since that date NASS has not terminated any contracts with private sector contractors providing accommodation or support to asylum seekers.

Chechens (Deportation)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will postpone the deportation of Chechens to Russia. [78526]

Simon Hughes *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The Home Office, in conjunction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, closely monitors the situation in the Russian Federation, and in particular, the conflict in Chechnya. We are aware that the Russian authorities have intensified their security operations in the wake of the terrorist incident in Moscow, but the impact of this remains unclear thus far. Our deportation policy, however, is kept under constant review.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 3 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Tabasum Raja and Asif Kamal. [78044]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 30 October 2002.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government is taking to ensure that the Criminal Records Bureau delivers an effective service to its customers. [77742]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government is committed to the delivery of an effective service for undertaking pre-employment criminal record checks for people working with children and vulnerable adults. The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) has not so far been able to provide a satisfactory service.

A number of steps have already been taken to improve the CRB's performance. In May an initial service improvement plan was put in place. As a result the number of disclosures issued by the CRB has increased from an average of 24,500 per week in August to an average of 39,500 per week in the three weeks ending 26 October. The CRB has now issued 541,000 disclosures.

In addition, in September I announced the appointment of an independent team, led by Patrick Carter, to take a fundamental look at the strategy and operations of the CRB and its private-sector partner, Capita. The team will be looking to identify the longer-term changes in the way the CRB operates to ensure that it can meet the demand both for the standard and enhanced disclosures already in place and the basic disclosures to be introduced in due course.

I expect the independent team to report to me with their conclusions and recommendations by the end of the year. It is likely, however, to require a period of months before any system changes necessary to deliver the required step change in the CRB's output can be fully implemented. In the meantime it is expected that there will be a gradual improvement in performance through the ongoing service improvement plan.

In the interim, we need to take steps to ensure that the demand for disclosures is in line with the CRB's current ability to process the applications. I have therefore agreed with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health, and for Education and Skills a number of measures to defer the existing or proposed requirement on certain occupations or office holders to obtain a CRB disclosure.

Persons caring for children and vulnerable adults will, as now, continue to be subject to rigorous pre-employment checks, including confirming previous employment history and taking up references, to ensure their suitability for the position in question. All those occupations which were subject to a criminal record check prior to the advent of the CRB will continue to be subject to such a check.

The details of the measures are set out as follows:

Care Homes

The care homes regulations (relating to care homes for adults) currently require CRB checks for existing staff—that is, those employed to work in a care home immediately before 1 April 2002—to be completed by 31 March 2003. The Government will be amending the regulations to extend this time limit. Existing care home staff will now be required to obtain a CRB check during the course of 2004. New care homes staff will continue to be required to have CRB checks, as will registered providers and managers of care homes.

Nurses agencies and domiciliary care agencies

Nurses supplied by nurses agencies, and staff supplied by domiciliary care agencies, will not be required to have CRB checks for the time being. The Department of Health will still be going ahead with the introduction of the nurses agency and domiciliary care agency regulations to come into effect in February 2003, but without the requirement for CRB checks. Staff will be required to provide a statement that they have no criminal convictions, or to provide a statement of any criminal convictions that they do have.

The CRB check requirements will however, apply to registered providers and managers of nurses agencies and domiciliary care agencies.

Some nurses agencies are already having to comply with requirements for CRB checks, which stem from the care homes regulations and the private and voluntary health care regulations which are already in place. These require checks to be made before temporary staff can be placed in those settings. These requirements have been in place since April 2002, and are not being removed.

Other Department of Health regulations

There will be no change to other regulations under the Care Standards Act 2000. Furthermore, none of these measures affect the requirements of those working with children to have a Protection of Children Act list check and the checks required by the Children's Homes Regulations and the Fostering Services Regulations.

It is planned that regulations on residential family centres and adoption agencies will come into effect, with CRB check requirements, in February and April 2003 respectively.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has agreed to postpone the implementation of the Protection of Vulnerable Adults list provided for the Care Standards Act.

All these arrangements are designed to avoid having regulations in place which cannot be complied with by providers. The Government recognises the importance of criminal records checks but at the same time providers must not be prevented from operating. Care homes have to be able to continue to employ existing staff, and we believe that domiciliary care agencies and nurses agencies should not be prevented from being able to place staff because they have not obtained checks.

The regulations and national minimum standards, even with the CRB check requirements, will still be a significant factor in driving up standards and protecting service users. Among other things, they will cover the way the organisation is run, recruitment procedures, staffing arrangements, user feedback, information for service users, all of which are part of a system to protect vulnerable people.

School Governors

School governors will not be required to have CRB checks for the time being. The Department for Education and Skills will still be going ahead with the introduction of the School Governance (Constitution) regulations to come into effect in April 2003, but without the requirement for CRB checks.

The Government remains committed to introducing CRB checks in these areas at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Home Office, in conjunction with the Department of Health for Education and Skills, will be issuing detailed guidance to Registered Bodies about the implications of the above measures. The three Departments will continue to work with their partners and the CRB as the situation develops.

EU Border Policing

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the timetable through which *(a)* his press office, *(b)* his staff and *(c)* he were informed of proposals in the European Commission for the establishment of common EU border policing. [78125]

Beverley Hughes: The communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament towards integrated management of the external borders of the member states of the European Union was released to member states on 7 May 2002 and deposited for parliamentary scrutiny on 17 May 2002.

The Communication was received by the Home Office and forwarded to the relevant directorates. Press office would not normally receive this as a matter of course.

An explanatory memorandum on the communication was forwarded to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 14 June 2002.

Funded Projects (Kingston upon Hull)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the projects to which his Department has allocated funding in the Kingston-upon-Hull North constituency since 1997, indicating the amount in each case. [76560]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The table outlines projects that have been funded in the Kingston-upon-Hull local authority area.

£

Project	*Amount per year*	*Total*
Communities against drugs 2001–03	373,500/373,500	747,000
Safer communities initiative 2002–03	152,828	152,828
Small retailers in deprived areas 2001–03	40,450/81,030	121,480
Partnership development fund 2000–03	10,000/121,000/110,500	241,500
Intervention work in schools	341,000	341,000
City of Hull CCTV	5,000,000	5,000,000
Reducing burglary initiative (Stoneferry/Bramsholme)	135,880	135,880
Time limited development fund (North Hull Women's Centre) 2002–05	30,153/31,109/31,987	93,249
'Splash' funding (Youth Offending Team: YOT) summer 2000	1,570	1,570
Bail supervision and support services 1999–2002	58,056/58,056/58,056	174,170
Restorative justice services 1999–2002	98,299/98,299/98,299	294,897
Parenting 1999–2001	10,988/10,988	21,976
YOT extra resources (used to develop its youth crime prevention strategy) 1999–2002	55,700/30,682/20,905	107,287
Literacy/numeracy mentoring project 2001–03	17,500/34,930	52,430
General YOT funding 2001–03	101,955/207,844	309,799
Referral order funding for YOTs 2001–03	26,812/59,385	86,197
Drugs funding of YOTs 2001–03	25,489/63,097	88,586
Total spend		7,969,849

Funded Projects (North Wales)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the projects to which his Department has allocated funding in the North Wales Police Authority area since May 1997. [77620]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* The table outlines projects that have been funded in the North Wales Police Authority area. This encompasses the Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Wrexham and Flintshire Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas.

Project	*Total (£)*
Communities Against Drugs 01/03	1,121,000
Safer Communities Initiative 02/03	201,814
Small Retailers in Deprived Areas 01/03	146,321
Partnership Development Fund 00/03	512,390
Youth Inclusion Project(Wrexham	225,000
Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Projects	2,146,565
Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire Reducing Burglary Project	33,300
Violence Against Women Projects	160,500
'Splash' Funding (Youth Offending Team: YOT) Summer 2000 and 2001	58,000
Neighbourhood Wardens—Caernarfon	35,000
Wrexham Industrial Estate—Targeted Policing Project	188,000
Total Spend	4,827,890

In addition, mainstream funding of £406 million has been allocated to North Wales for policing since 1997.

Immigration Offences (Stranraer and Cairnryan)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were detained on immigration offences during each of the last three years at Stranraer and Cairnryan ports. [78500]

Beverley Hughes: Persons detained at Stranraer and Cairnryan for immigration offences as follows:

	Number detained
1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000	31
1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001	153
1 January 2002 to 31 October 2002	206

The figure for the current year 2002 is from local management information and may be subject to change.

Immigration Offences (Stranraer)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those persons detained on immigration offences at Stranraer port were *(a)* outbound to Northern Ireland and *(b)* inbound from Northern Ireland in each of the last three years. [78501]

Beverley Hughes: Persons detained at Stranraer:

	Outbound to Northern Ireland	*Inbound from Northern Ireland*
1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000	31	0
1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001	135	18
1 January 2002 to 31 October 2002	159	46

The figures for 2002 are from local management information and may be subject to change.

Immigration Service (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Immigration Service staff are based in Scotland; and how many of these are qualified to process asylum applications. [78498]

Beverley Hughes: On 31 October 2002, there were 112 immigration staff based in Scotland. The work of all staff includes some level of involvement in the asylum process.

Iraqi People (Support)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqis applied for hard case support in each of the past 12 months; and how many received it. [78543]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The requested information is not available.

Leave to Remain

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to replace the application forms for foreign nationals wishing to apply for leave to remain in the United Kingdom. [79538]

Beverley Hughes: The current application forms are valid for use only until 14 November 2002. Revised forms will be prescribed before then. From the time they are issued until 14 November 2002, applications may be made on either the new forms or the present versions. Only the new forms may be used for applications made on or after 15 November 2002. Copies will be placed in the Library when they are available.

Mariana Carr

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when the application by Mrs. Mariana Carr for British citizenship, ref C1059748, will be dealt with. [78910]

Beverley Hughes: Mrs. Carr's nationality application was approved on 19 September and an oath of allegiance was sent to Mrs. Carr's home address.

Mrs. Carr's certificate of British Nationality was issued on 27 September 2002.

Marsham Street Redevelopment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what timber has been purchased and used in the redevelopment of 2 Marsham Street, London; and who supplied the timber. [77674]

Beverley Hughes: As of 4 November 2002, no works have been undertaken on the construction of the Home Office's new building at 2 Marsham Street. No timber has been purchased at this time.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been put in place to ensure that the redevelopment of 2 Marsham Street, London, will be covered by Government requirements to ensure timber purchases are from legal and sustainable sources. [77675]

Beverley Hughes: Procurement and use of legal timber has been identified as a requirement of the contract signed by the Home Office and Anne Gates Property plc (AGP) in March 2002. Independently verified documentary evidence will be obtained relating to the source of timber.

The contract requires timber to be certified by the supplier as purchased in accordance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES); to be from a supplier with an environmental timber purchasing policy; and requires AGP to consider acquiring reclaimed timber or products made from reclaimed timber where it is cost-effective and practicable to do so.

AGP are minimizing the amount of hardwood used, both in terms of the use of alternative materials and through the use of veneers. AGP will also ensure, through their Quality Assurance systems, that rigorous checks are made to ensure that timber is procured from sources as contracted.

People Trafficking

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken by the Government to curb the number of women illegally trafficked against their will for use in vice rings. [77555]

Beverley Hughes: We set out a comprehensive approach to tackle trafficking and other forms of organised crime in the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven" published earlier this year. This approach encompasses new legislation to criminalise trafficking. The Nationality Immigration and Asylum (NIA) Bill currently before Parliament creates an offence of trafficking for the purpose of controlling someone through prostitution, with a tough maximum sentence of 14 years. This measure will tackle the worst forms of exploitation, pending the introduction of comprehensive legislation that will cover trafficking for the purposes of both labour and sexual exploitation.

We are working to tackle the criminal networks involved in people trafficking through Reflex, the multi-agency response to organised immigration crime. Reflex has co-ordinated intelligence on the scale and has assisted with planning operations such as Horsley, which dismantled a group trafficking Thai women into the UK.

We also recognise the importance of providing protection for the victims of trafficking in order to encourage them to co- operate with the authorities. We are developing support arrangements for victims in co-operation with the voluntary sector and plan to establish a pilot scheme next year. In conjunction with this we are developing a toolkit to raise awareness of the problem with police and immigration officers to help them to identify victims.

Finally, we are working with our European Union partners and with source and transit countries to build effective international action. We have established a network of liaison officers to build intelligence on routes and methods used by the traffickers. We are also working with the International Organisation for Migration to develop a programme for the safe voluntary return of trafficking victims.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to tackle human trafficking into the United Kingdom. [78149]

Beverley Hughes: We set out a comprehensive approach to tackle trafficking and other forms of organised crime in the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven" published earlier this year. This approach encompasses new legislation to criminalise trafficking. The Nationality Immigration and Asylum (NIA) Bill currently before Parliament creates an offence of trafficking for the purpose of controlling someone through prostitution, with a tough maximum sentence of 14 years. This measure will tackle the worst forms of exploitation, pending the introduction of comprehensive legislation that will cover trafficking for the purposes of both labour and sexual exploitation.

We are working to tackle the criminal networks involved in people trafficking through Reflex, the multi-agency response to organised immigration crime. Its remit is to co-ordinate operations against organised immigration crime and to develop the intelligence and strategic planning to underpin them.

We also recognise the importance of providing protection for the victims of trafficking in order to encourage them to co- operate with the authorities. We are developing support arrangements for victims in co-operation with the voluntary sector and plan to establish a pilot scheme next year, in conjunction with this we are developing a toolkit to raise awareness of the problem with police and immigration officers to help them to treat victims compassionately.

Finally, we are working with our European Union partners and with source and transit countries to build effective international action. We have established a network of liaison officers to build intelligence on routes and methods used by the traffickers. We are also working with the International Organisation for Migration to develop a programme for the safe voluntary return of trafficking victims.

Police Arrests (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been arrested in the Chorley constituency in each of the last three years. [77765]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of arrests for notifiable offences is collected centrally at police force area level only. Available information shows that in 1999–2000 there were 37,535 arrests for notifiable offences within the Lancashire police force area and in 2000–01 (latest available) 36,998. Information for earlier years is not available on a consistent basis. Figures for 2001–02 will be available in due course.

Police Formula

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department has made to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of its preferred outcome for the police formula under the Formula Grant Distribution Consultation. [78508]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 October 20[illegible]]:* The Home Department has regular discussions with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on a number of issues including the Local Government Finance Formula Grant Distribution.

Police Numbers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there are in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the north-west of England and *(c)* Wales. [77634]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table.

Force/region	*Police strength as at March 2002*	*Civilian support staff as at 31 March 2002*
Lancashire	3,304	1,442
North West	17,804	7,624
Wales	7,194	3,109

Source:
Home Office Statistical Bulletin—Police Service Strength 31 March 2002.

Lancashire constabulary is at record levels of police officers.

Police Officers

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been employed by *(a)* Avon and Somerset constabulary and *(b)* West Somerset division in each of the 10 years for which figures are available. [77760]

Mr. Denham: The information requested for Avon and Somerset constabulary is set out in the table. Data for individual divisions/basic command units is not collected centrally. By March 2002 Avon and Somerset constabulary had a record number of police officers.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary

Year as at 31 March	*Police officer strength*	*Civilian support staff*
1992	3,081	899
1993	3,068	1,171
1994	3,033	1,195
1995	3,000	1,204
1996	2,981	1,213
1997	2,989	1,438
1998	2,976	1,393
1999	2,999	1,424
2000	2,934	1,436
2001	2,994	1,452
2002	3,096	1,611

Source:
Home Office Statistical Bulletins(Police Service Strength 1997—2002. Home Office historical data 1992–96.

Police Staff

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many non-operational staff are employed by the police in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the North West of England and *(c)* Wales. [77636]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has provided the figures set out in the table for the 12 months ending 31 March 2002.

HMIC figures count staff according to the following primary roles (a role that takes up more than half of a person's time):

Operational: any member of staff, including covert staff, whose primary role is to directly deliver the overarching aims of the Police Service;

Operational Support: any member of staff whose primary role is to support the delivery of the overarching aims of the Police Service; and

Organisational Support: any member of staff whose primary role is to service the internal needs of the organisation.

The table shows the total of Operational Support and Organisational Support staff.

Force/area	Non-operational police officers	Non-operational civilian support staff
Lancashire Constabulary	233	903
North West Region	1,413	6,276
Wales	526	2,445

Police Training

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to chief constables about the possibility of police forces being *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* sued for the consequences of insufficient health and safety training of their officers involved in various policing situations. [77487]

Mr. Denham: Home Office Circular 33/1997 advises Chief Officers on their duties under the Police (Health and Safety) Act 1997. Annex A refers to the legal liability of Chief Officers.

Policing (Rural Areas)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on policing in rural areas. [75893]

Mr. Denham: Support for the police service in both rural and urban areas continues to be a key element of this Government's policy. We now have the highest levels of police officers since records began in 1921 (129,603).

Last year we provided an extra £30 million through the Rural Policing Fund to tackle problems faced in the 31 more rural police areas. This is being paid again this year.

The Police Authority and the Chief Officer may decide how to spend this additional money for the benefit of rural communities. It may be used to fund additional officers. Some police authorities have used the money to buy and operate mobile police stations to provide an enhanced police presence in remote areas.

Police numbers in the rural areas have increased significantly. At 31 March 2002 there were 60,401 officers in the 31 more rural forces. This represents an increase of 2.6 per cent. over March 2001 and 4.9 per cent. over March 2000.

Police forces can also employ Community Support Officers (CSO's) to provide additional support in rural communities. 19 of the 27 successful bids on the new CSO Fund were from the 31 more rural forces and they will receive between them £3.9 million this year. CSOs will provide a visible police presence and will have a vital role to play in support of the police in reducing the fear of crime, increasing public safety and tackling anti-social behaviour.

Prison Population (England)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the population of English prisons in each of the last five years for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* juveniles. [70817]

Hilary Benn: The number of males and females held in prisons in England since 1998 is shown in the table. The number of juveniles in custody is also shown.

The juvenile estate was established in April 2000, which is when the Youth Justice Board began collecting data on juveniles separately from the prison service. The juvenile figures for 2000 onwards therefore include those children held in private sector secure training centres and local authority secure children's homes in addition to the previously supplied prison service establishments. The juvenile figures for 1998 and 1999 are for those in prison service establishments only.

Year[1]	Males[2]	Females[2]	Juveniles[3]
1998	60,584	3,120	2,446
1999	59,232	3,207	2,359
2000	59,916	3,355	2,665
2001	60,640	3,713	2,777
2002	64,560	4,394	3,014

[1] All data represent 30 June.

[2] Data for males and females include juveniles in prison service establishments.

[3] Under 18 years of age.

Radioactivity Monitors at British Ports

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he will announce the *(a)* location and *(b)* the commencement date of the proposed pilot to install radioactivity monitors at British ports. [38590]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* As a result of the terrorist in America in September last year, reviews have been undertaken of the security arrangements to counter the new threats that now exist to this country. This has resulted in a number of new measures, initiatives and trials. For obvious reasons I do not propose to give details of them. However, I can confirm that screening is part of this overall package.

Retail Crime

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide funding to local retail crime prevention initiatives in town shopping centres and secondary shopping areas. [77977]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 605W.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the correlation between retail crime and drug abuse; [78129]

(2) what assessment he has made of the correlation between retail crime and street crime. [78135]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) on 19 September 2002, *Official Report*, column 19W.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of retail crime was to *(a)* business, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* the police in each of the past three years; and what information he has on the amount spent by the retail sector on crime prevention measures in each of the last three years. [78131]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office does not collect information about the cost of retail crime. The British Retail Consortium conducts an annual retail crime survey and the most recent, published in June 2002, estimated total retail crime losses in the United Kingdom at £2.4 billion in 2001, down from an estimated £2.5 billion in 2000. The survey of crimes affecting retailers and manufacturers announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 23 April 2002, the results of which should be available next spring, will provide information on the amount spent by the retail sector on crime prevention measures over the past year. The British Retail Consortium is assisting us with our survey.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the money allocated to his Department in this year's Budget will be used to tackle retail crime. [78133]

Mr. Denham: It is not possible to provide an overall figure for the amount of money allocated to the Home Office in this year's budget, which will be used to tackle retail crime. Chief officers of police forces and individual crime and disorder reduction partnerships decide on the priorities for their local areas, and a proportion of their mainstream expenditure or their Home Office funding may be spent on tackling retail crime. Many of the measures taken to reduce particular crimes, such as juvenile crime, street crime and drug-related crime, and anti-social behaviour, are also likely to have a beneficial impact on reducing retail crime.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to tackle retail crime. [78136]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 846W.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make retail crime a best value indicator for police force performance. [78137]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon Friend to the answer I gave to the hon Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1493W.

Special Constables

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many special constables there were in each police force in England and Wales on *(a)* 1st September 2002 and *(b)* 1 September of each of the last five years; [77640]

(2) how many special constables there are in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the north-west of England and *(c)* Wales. [77639]

Mr. Denham: Data on police officer numbers in England and Wales, including the Special Constabulary, is collected in March and September each year by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate and published in the statistical bulletin "Police Service Strength".

The data on Special Constabulary strength for 30 September 1997 to 30 September 2001 is set out in the table. For 2002, the latest figure available is for 31 March 2002.

The Special Constabulary has a vital role to play in reducing crime and providing reassurance to the public and we are committed to increasing the numbers of specials. We are working with stakeholders on a variety of measures, including good practice guidance to help forces improve the recruitment, management and deployment of specials.

Table 1: Specials Numbers

Police force	*September*					*March*
	1977	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Avon and Somerset	629	584	482	416	391	364
Bedfordshire	186	175	148	134	119	118
Cambridgeshire	336	308	293	214	197	207
Cheshire	491	416	358	307	233	191
Cleveland	157	136	108	122	98	85
Cumbria	184	210	193	167	125	102
Derbyshire	414	355	303	286	263	260
Devon and Cornwall	1,079	916	908	836	780	689
Dorset	325	303	287	278	258	253
Durham	178	159	169	155	146	134
Essex	641	590	528	478	413	381
Gloucestershire	287	245	221	197	183	154
Greater Manchester	657	567	498	408	355	338
Hampshire	681	747	720	500	444	444
Hertfordshire	306	267	232	214	177	206
Humberside	348	289	263	198	207	207
Kent	588	565	484	416	366	327
Lancashire	500	465	397	362	325	363
Leicestershire	402	350	303	202	155	143
Lincolnshire	273	233	218	179	160	155

Table 1: Specials Numbers

Police force	1977	1998	September 1999	2000	2001	March 2002
City of London	84	69	66	46	34	36
Merseyside	407	463	467	452	507	468
Metropolitan police	1,528	1,214	1,173	754	753	680
Norfolk	346	351	317	270	240	244
Northamptonshire	314	262	210	195	184	177
Northumbria	480	352	356	323	276	256
North Yorkshire	337	302	245	189	186	185
Nottinghamshire	597	530	405	411	281	341
South Yorkshire	295	266	236	193	189	206
Staffordshire	643	558	460	461	395	384
Suffolk	300	402	420	376	322	308
Surrey	231	226	205	168	176	187
Sussex	465	415	377	317	301	306
Thames Valley	694	587	514	463	377	356
Warwickshire	379	323	260	260	208	209
West Mercia	558	499	512	443	364	339
West Midlands	949	784	697	662	604	598
West Yorkshire	604	590	572	452	371	349
Wiltshire	150	176	182	172	160	147
Dyfed Powys	241	237	237	193	174	157
Gwent	149	114	110	131	148	142
North Wales	388	336	262	233	203	125
South Wales	362	360	331	254	250	277
Total	19,163	17,296	15,727	13,487	12, 068	11,598

Source:
Figures provided by Research Development Statistics Directorate

Speeding Offences (Police)

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many drivers of police cars were caught exceeding the speed limit by speed cameras in the last year when not attending to an emergency call; [77830]

(2) how many drivers of police cars that were caught exceeding the speed limit by speed cameras in the last year when not attending to an emergency call were prosecuted. [77829]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally.

Street Crime (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the levels of street crime in Lancashire. [77635]

Mr. Denham: Lancashire is one of the 10 areas involved in the Government's street crime initiative, which was announced on 17 March 2002.

We published street crime figures on 14 October 2002 charting progress under the initiative to the end of September. There are two indicators of progress: a comparison with the period immediately before the initiative began, and a direct comparison with the same period last year.

In Lancashire, there was a 20 per cent reduction in street crime offences (robbery and snatch theft) between April and September 2002. For robbery, the more serious offence, figures showed 15 per cent fewer offences in September compared to March, the month preceding the initiative.

Year on year comparisons show an 11 per cent reduction in the number of robberies in Lancashire in the six months from April to September 2002, compared to the same period last year.

Published figures for the first six months of the initiative, including a document detailing the achievements made through the initiative's partnership work, can be found in the Library or on the Crime Reduction website atwww.crimereduction.gov.uk/streetcrime.

Violent Crime

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many incidents of violent crime there were in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the north-west of England and *(c)* Wales in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [77633]

Robbery

(2) how many incidents of robbery there were in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the north-west of England and *(c)* Wales in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [77638]

Mr. Denham: The requested details in respect of crimes recorded by the police in the year ending March 2002 have already been published in table 6.06 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Crime in England and Wales 2001–02", which was published in July this year, and is available in the Library. The table also gives rates for overall violent crime obtained from the British Crime Survey, which records people's actual experiences of crime.

Recorded crime figures may have been affected in comparison to the previous year as a result of changes to police recording practices. Some of the forces in Wales and the North West, including Lancashire, implemented the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard in advance of its national introduction in April 2002. This early implementation by these and other police forces had the effect of uplifting the number of offences of violence against the person in England and Wales as a whole in 2001–02 by an estimated 13 per cent.

Work Permits

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits were issued to foreign nationals in each of the last five years. [78723]

Beverley Hughes: The number of work permits issued to foreign nationals is as follows:

2001–02—123,337
2000–01—99,815
1999–2000—63,853
1998–99—57,089
1997–98—47,009

The figures above include all individual and group work permit applications which have been approved in each of the last five financial years.

Yarl's Wood Detention Centre

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the re-opened facility at Yarl's Wood, Bedfordshire will be used from April 2003 for *(a)* the long-term detention of asylum seekers and *(b)* their removal after refusal of their applications; and if he will make a statement. [78578]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* I can confirm the intention is for the remaining centre at Yarl's Wood to be ready to re-open in April 2003 with a population of single females, and later families, both asylum and non-asylum cases. In advance of this, work has already commenced to install sprinklers and the necessary facilities so that this population can be accommodated. As with all other removal centres, Yarl's Wood will be used to ensure we deliver our commitment to remove those without lawful right to be here. The intention is always to ensure that the period in detention is as short as possible. However, it is sometimes regrettably necessary to detain asylum seekers and other immigration related cases for longer periods of time.

Yarlswood Detention Centre

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what decision he has made in respect of the publication of the report which has been submitted to him by Stephen Moore, in respect of the circumstances of the fire at Yarlswood detention centre on 14 February; and if he will make a statement. [78579]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* It has not been decided when the report will be published. Stephen Moore has consulted widely and taken representations from a number of interested parties. However, his terms of reference require him to take full account of inquiries being undertaken by Bedfordshire police and the Bedfordshire fire and rescue service, neither of which has yet concluded investigations. He is also required to conduct his inquiry in a way that would not impede any criminal investigation. Criminal trials arising out of the events at Yarl's Wood on 14 and 15 February are listed for April 2003. Consideration is therefore still being given as to when the report can be completed and published.

Criminal Justice System

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he will take in response to the finding of Home Office Research Study 45: Improving Public Attitudes to the Criminal Justice System, that overall knowledge of the criminal justice system among the general public was poor. [73785]

Hilary Benn: We recognise that public understanding of the criminal justice system is poor, and the Home Office will take this into account when considering future communication activity.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has publicly acknowledged this fact, and has sought to encourage a wide-ranging public debate about the criminal justice system in the run up to and following publication of the Criminal Justice White Paper, "Justice for All". Work is under way to develop a plan and programme of work to improve public confidence in the criminal justice system.

HEALTH

EU Directives

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement regarding the EU's requirements with regards to sausage skins. [77049]

Ms Blears: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that, in the knowledge of a theoretical risk of BSE in sheep, the Agency has recommended to the European Union (EU) Commission that sheep intestines, used to make some sausage casings, be added to the EU list of specified risk material (SRM) prohibited from the food chain. The EU scientific steering committee (SSC) considered at its September meeting the most recent data on BSE and sheep intestines. The SSC decided not to recommend, at this time, the addition of sheep intestines to the list of SRM. At the same time, differing scientific opinions on the effectiveness of processing sheep intestines, in removing potential infective material should BSE be present in a sheep, were acknowledged. The Agency has subsequently suggested to the Commission that experts be called together at EU level to achieve better common understanding. The Commission has agreed to this. In the meantime, there are no restrictions on the sale or use of such sausage casings pending any decision at the EU level.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the impact on the NHS budget of the European food supplements directive and the proposed European directive on traditional herbal medicinal products; and if he will make a statement. [75816]

Ms Blears: The European Union food supplements directive is not expected to have any impact on the availability of vitamin and mineral supplements required by specific population groups, such as pregnant women. It is therefore not expected to have any impact on the national health service budget.

Overall, it is not possible to quantify the likely impact of the proposed traditional herbal medicines directive on the NHS budget.

The proposed directive on traditional herbal medicinal products should ensure the availability of a wide range of traditional herbal remedies made to assured standards of safety and quality, and accompanied by systematic and reliable information about the purpose of the product and its safe usage. Potentially the directive could help members of the public wishing to take greater responsibility for their own health to make an informed choice about which traditional herbal remedy may be helpful. It could also reduce the possibility of the public taking remedies that may be inappropriate to their health needs.

Food Labelling

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his position towards Directive 2002/67/EC (OJ L191, vol 45, 19 July 2002) on the labelling of foodstuffs containing *(a)* quinine and *(b)* caffeine; how many products on sale in the UK will be affected; and what cost assessment his Department has made of the cost of change in packaging. [77248]

Ms Blears: These labelling changes will help consumers make informed choices about consumption of these products. Many manufacturers already indicate when caffeine or quinine has been added as an ingredient and most beverages containing high levels of caffeine already carry a warning to that effect. The new rules do not take full effect until 1 July 2004 and the legislation provides for products labelled before that date to continue to be sold while stocks last. This generous transitional period should allow any necessary changes to be incorporated as part of normal label redesign cycles and therefore ensure costs are kept to a minimum.

Cancer Care Action Group

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations his Department has received concerning the effectiveness of the Cancer Care Action Group in identifying and implementing improvements to the quality of care for patients; [75748]

(2) if he will list the members of the Cancer Care Action Group and the organisations that they represent. [75747]

Ms Blears: The Cancer Care Action Group was established in 1998 after the Caring for Cancer conference, which brought together statutory and voluntary organisations involved in caring for those with cancer. Following the publication of the NHS Cancer Plan, the group was replaced by a supportive and palliative care strategy co-ordinating group.

The Supportive and Palliative Care Strategy Group membership comprises representatives from the Department of Health, the national health service, the National Council for Hospices and specialist palliative care services, Macmillan Cancer Relief, CancerBACUP, National Cancer Alliance, Marie Curie Cancer Care and voluntary hospices.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health through what mechanisms staff of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, deployed to patient forums, will be accountable to those forums and their local communities. [77425]

Mr. Lammy: Staff will be provided by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health to primary care trust patients' forums to support the members of patients' forums in their work. The work programme of the staff will be set by the patients' forum members. Therefore, while staff will be employed by the Commission on a day to day basis, they will be accountable to the patients' forum to which they are attached. It is for the Commission to decide exactly how this dual accountability will be managed and ensured.

Advisory Committee on Resources Allocations

Mr Dave Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the Advisory Committee on Resources Allocations committee recommendations and options; if he will consult on the *(a)* options and recommendations and *(b)* weighting that will be given to any measures used to determine need; and what weighting he plans to give to (i) basic per capita allocations, (ii) deprivation, (iii) ethnicity, (iv) poor health indicators, (v) ACA, (vi) low birth weight, (vii) income, (viii) unemployment, (ix) premature death rates and (x) other measures. [78617]

Mr. Hutton: We are currently considering the recommendations of the advisory committee on resource allocation (ACRA) for a new National Health Service funding formula. Later this autumn when we announce the revenue allocations for the next three years we will explain changes to the formula. The team who carried out the research into the new formula plan to publish a full report of their findings.

ACRA is an expert body whose membership is made up of individuals with a wide range of relevant experience and expertise from within and outside the NHS. We do not consult on ACRA's recommendations.

Ambulance Personnel (Assaults)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulance personnel by region have been *(a)* shot, *(b)* stabbed and *(c)* assaulted in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [78428]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Information on the type of and levels of violent incidents by individual staff group is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by national health service employers. Data on violent incidents involving all staff in the NHS were not collected on a national basis prior to 1998.

The results of the 2000–01 survey of reported violent or abusive incidents, accidents involving staff and sickness absence in NHS trusts and health authorities, in England, have been placed in the Library, along with a report setting out the Government's proposed action in light of the findings. The survey found that there were an estimated 13 reported violent or abusive incidents per 1,000 staff per month in ambulance trusts, compared to an estimated 10 such incidents for all NHS trusts.

Ambulance Services (Private Functions)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance he has issued to ambulance trusts on making crews and vehicles available for hire to cover private functions. [78375]

Mr. Lammy *[holding reply issued on Thursday 31 October]:* National Health Service Trusts may provide ambulance services to events such as sporting fixtures if there is no detriment to NHS services and the full cost is recovered.

Arthritis

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many persons were suffering from arthritis in each of the last 10 years. [77537]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. However, Arthritis Care estimates that there are more than 200 types of arthritis and rheumatic disease, and more than 8 million people in the United Kingdom have long-term health problems due to arthritis or a related condition.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* Essex were occupied by delayed discharge patients (i) at the latest available date and (ii) in each of the last four quarters. [77148]

Mr. Lammy: Information on delayed discharges is collected centrally and is placed in the Library.

Before 1 April 2002 data were collected at the old health authority level. Health authorities were disbanded on 1 April 2002 and replaced with primary care trusts.

Health authority level data up to and including Q4 2001–02 (March 2002) are available.

For Quarter 1 2002–03 (up until the end of June 2002) primary care trust level data are available.

Care Homes (Closure)

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the closure of care homes. [77512]

Jacqui Smith: Department figures show that between 1997 and 2001, the most recent figures available, the number of care homes in England reduced by only 640 or two per cent. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State announced, on 23 July, an extra £1 billion for social services by 2006. Some of this money can be used to boost capacity in the care home sector.

Child Prostitution

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were identified as being involved in prostitution in each of the past five years. [78015]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

Child Protection

Dr Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the Government intends to ensure that the safeguarding of vulnerable children takes place at a primary care level and that GPs participate to an extent which does not impinge upon them carrying out other clinical duties. [78021]

Jacqui Smith: From April 2002, responsibility for securing the provision of the health contribution to child protection services began to be devolved to primary care trusts (PCTs). The particular roles and responsibilities of health professionals for child protection are set out in the Government's core inter-agency child protection guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children. Although this is a new role for PCTs, they are not expected to assume this responsibility without support. Child protection will form a key competency task within the national primary and care trust development programme currently being developed.

The exercise of responsibility for child protection involves more than the specific clinical service; it necessitates PCTs exercising a public health responsibility for a whole population. It will require good partnership working with all stakeholders, in particular councils with social services responsibilities. Guidance on specific action required was issued to all chief executives of PCTs in January this year. This will be followed next year by supplementary child protection guidance for health professionals. In addition, the national primary and care trust development programme team are currently running child protection seminars for PCT directors with responsibility for children.

Dr Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he plans to take to ensure that area child protection committees receive sufficient funding to discharge their responsibilities. [78022]

Jacqui Smith Area child protection committee (ACPC) expenditure and administrative and policy support is a matter for local agreement. As a multi-agency forum, the ACPC should be supported in its work by its main constituent agencies, reflecting the investment of each agency in activities which are of benefit to all, in particular inter-agency training.

The Joint Chief Inspectors' report Safeguarding Children, published on 14 October 2002, contains a recommendation that the Department of Health should

review the current arrangements for ACPCs to determine whether they should be established on a statutory basis to ensure adequate accountability, authority and funding. The Government has welcomed the publication of this report. The Government recognises that there is still more to be done to ensure that the highest standards of child protection are applied in every case. That is why it commissioned the Joint Chief Inspector's report. It is also why my right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Health and the Home Secretary set up the statutory inquiry, chaired by Lord Laming, into the circumstances leading up to, and surrounding, the death of Victoria Climbie. The Government looks forward to receiving Lord Laming's report later this year. It will respond in full to both reports after it has had the opportunity to consider them fully.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many serious case reviews were carried out by each area child protection committee in each of the last five years. [78023]

Jacqui Smith: Complete statistical information is not held centrally on the numbers or types of serious case reviews that have been carried out in accordance with Chapter 8 of "Working Together to Safeguard Children (1999)".

However, many findings from serious case reviews can serve as an important source of information to inform policy and practice at both national and local levels. In recognition of this, the Department is responsible for identifying and disseminating common themes and trends across review reports, and acting on lessons for policy and practice. We recently published an overview report, "Learning from Past Experience—A Review of Serious Case Reviews", drawing out the key findings of a selection of case reviews from the last two years, and their implications for policy and practice. At the same time, we have recently launched a new comprehensive database, which will in future hold information about all serious case reviews.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of accident and emergency departments do not have access to child protection registers. [78024]

Mr. Lammy: All accident and emergency departments have access to information contained in child protection registers held by local authority social services departments, subject to the normal safeguards. Access out of office hours is through out of office arrangements with local authority social services departments.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason the Child Protection Register contains those children who are on social services department client index as a consequence of being regarded as at risk; [78027]

(2) what the main criteria is for placing a vulnerable child who has been a client of a social services department on a child protection register. [78031]

Jacqui Smith: As "Working Together to Safeguard Children", the Government's child protection guidance, makes clear, the sole criteria for consideration by an initial child protection conference, when determining whether to register a child's name on the child protection register, is whether a child is at risk of significant harm.

The test should be that either: the child can be shown to have suffered ill-treatment or impairment of health or development as a result of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect and professional judgement is that further ill-treatment or impairment are likely; or professional judgement, substantiated by the findings of enquiries in this individual case or by research evidence, is that the child is likely to suffer ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development as a result of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect.

The decision whether or not to register a child's name on the child protection register should not be taken on the grounds that the child is already known to social services.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the role of child and adolescent mental health services is with regard to safeguarding vulnerable children. [78036]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance on this is given in "Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children", published by the Department of Health, the Home Office and the then Department for Education and Employment in 1999. A copy is in the Library. Paragraphs 3.39–3.41 of the guide relate to all mental health services and 3.42–3.44 to child and adolescent mental health services. The latter includes the role of relevant professional staff in cases where abuse and/or neglect is identified or suspected and the provision, where appropriate, of a range of assessment and treatment services for children with mental health disorders and their families.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to establish area child protection committees on a statutory basis. [78037]

Jacqui Smith: The Joint Chief Inspectors' report "Safeguarding Children", published on 14 October 2002, contains a recommendation that the Department should review the current arrangements for area child protection committees to determine whether they should be established on a statutory basis to ensure adequate accountability, authority and funding.

The Government have welcomed the publication of this report. The Government recognise that there is still more to be done to ensure that the highest standards of child protection are applied in every case. That is why it commissioned the Joint Chief Inspectors' report. It is also why my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Health and the Home Secretary set up the statutory inquiry, chaired by Lord Laming, into the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the death of Victoria Climbie. The Government looks forward to receiving Lord Laming's report later this year. It will respond in full to both reports after it has had the opportunity to consider them fully.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what use child protection registers are put; and how he expects this to change in the next three years. [78038]

Jacqui Smith: A central child protection register should be maintained in each area covered by a social services department. The register should list all the children resident in the area (including those who have been placed there by another local authority or agency) who are considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm, and for whom there is a child protection plan. The principal purpose of the register is to make agencies and professionals aware of those children who are judged to be at continuing risk of significant harm and in need of active safeguarding.

The Joint Chief Inspectors' report "Safeguarding Children", published on 14 October 2002, contains a recommendation that the Department should review the purpose of child protection registers and issue guidance to local authorities.

The Government have welcomed the publication of this report. The Government recognise that there is still more to be done to ensure that the highest standards of child protection are applied in every case. That is why it commissioned the Joint Chief Inspectors' report. It is also why my right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Health and the Home Secretary set up the statutory inquiry, chaired by Lord Laming, into the circumstances leading up to, and surrounding, the death of Victoria Climbie. The Government look forward to receiving Lord Laming's report later this year. It will respond in full to both reports after it has had the opportunity to consider them fully.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many area child protection committees do not have representatives from youth offending teams; and if he will set a deadline for all area child protection committees to include representatives from youth offending teams. [78039]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

The Joint Chief Inspectors' report, "Safeguarding Children", published on 14 October 2002, contains a recommendation that the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office and the Department of Health should issue immediate guidance to ensure that local youth offending teams and the Crown Prosecution Service are invited to become full members of all area child protection committees.

Dr Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in each of the last five years have left local authority care and within five years *(a)* committed suicide and *(b)* attempted suicide. [78051]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect statistical information on committed or attempted suicide for children and young people that have left local authority care.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government will publish their response to the Health Committee's Third Report of Session 2001–02 on Delayed Discharges. [79584]

Jacqui Smith: The Government's response to the Health Select Committee's Third Report of Session 2001–02 on Delayed Discharges has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Free Fruit (Schools)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to introduce free fruit in primary schools; and what estimate he has made of how much such provision would cost. [77011]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The national school fruit scheme will entitle every child aged four to six to a free piece of fruit each school day from 2004. The scheme is currently being expanded to all eligible schools through large scale pilots on a region by region basis with funding of £42 million from the new opportunities fund.

The expansion began with the West Midlands and is continuing in London this school term. By the end of this year free fruit will be available to up to 600,000 children in around 4,000 schools. The next regions to benefit will be North West and East Midlands.

We will be closely monitoring and reviewing the experience from the pilots in order to make an accurate assessment of the annual cost of provision on a national scale.

Health Statistics

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths there were from complications arising from fractured bones in each of the last five years. [78571]

Ruth Kelly: The answer requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Lynne Jones, of 4 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question asking how many deaths there were from complications arising from fractured bones in each of the last five years. (78571)

It is not possible from routinely coded mortality data to obtain figures on complications arising from fractured bones. For deaths where an accident or violence initiated the train of events leading directly to death, a code is assigned to the type of injury sustained by the deceased. The figures below indicate the numbers of deaths where that injury was a fracture.

Number of deaths from fractures[1], England and Wales, 1997 to 2001

	Number of deaths
Calendar year[2]	
1997	3,650
1998	3,536
1999	3,613
2000	3,921
2001[3]	4,670

[1] The nature of injury was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes 800 to 829 for the years 1997 to 2000 and, for the year 2001, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes S02, 812, S22, S32, S42, S52, 862, 872, 882, 892, T02, T08, T10, T12, T14.2.

[2] Figures are for deaths occurring in each calendar year

[1] The introduction of ICD-10 for coding cause of death in 2001 means that data for fractures in this year are not comparable with data for earlier years. The introduction of ICD-10 has led to an apparent increase of 17% in the number of deaths coded to fractures. The figures should therefore be interpreted with caution. The effect of the change in classification in 2001 is described in a report published in May 2002.[1]

[1] Office for National Statistics. Results of the ICD-10 bridge coding study, England and Wales, 1999. Health Statistics Quarterly 14 (2002), 75–83.

Hepatitis B (Prisons)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of prisoners have been vaccinated against hepatitis B; and how many had been vaccinated in 2000. [77998]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not available in the form requested. Returns from prison service establishments indicate that the number of prisoners who completed a course of Hepatitis B vaccinations in 2000–01 was 3,912. The comparable figure for 2001–02 was 5,463.

Impersonation of Doctors

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been found guilty of impersonating a specialist in *(a)* obstetrics and *(b)* gynaecology in each of the last 10 years. [76616]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 October 2002]:* The crime of pretending to be a registered medical practitioner is a police matter, and I am not aware of statistics for numbers charged or convicted. The Department has issued guidance on the registration and employment of doctors, stating that employers must ensure that any doctor who is offered employment is suitably registered before taking up their duties.

Infertility Treatment

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to end postcode prescribing of infertility treatment. [77840]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is developing clinical guidelines to cover the treatment of infertility which they expect to deliver in November 2003. The guidelines will make the latest knowledge and best practice available to all parts of the national health service. We expect the fertility guidelines to be implemented consistently across the NHS. Once issued, the uptake of this guidance will be monitored locally and by the Commission for Health Improvement.

Kava-kava

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the conclusions of the Food Standards Agency's consultation to prohibit the herbal ingredient kava-kava in food products. [78159]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The Food Standards Agency will advise on action to be taken in relation to foods containing kava-kava when it has considered responses to the public consultation which closed on Friday 27 September.

Leicestershire Health Trust

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many administrators there are as a ratio of the number of clinical staff in the Leicestershire Health Trust. [77947]

Mr. Lammy: The ratio of the number of administration staff to clinical staff at the University Hospitals of Leicester National Health Service Trust is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Medical and dental and non-medical staff by specified group within the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust as at 30 September 2001

	whole-time equivalents	*headcount*
All staff	8,340	10,120
Admnistration[1]	1,680	1,990
Clinical staff[2]	6,200	7,520
of which		
Medical and dental staff	1,050.00	1,170
Clinical (Non-medical)	5,150	6,350
Others[3]	460	600
Ratio of administrators to clinical staff[4]	1 to 3.7	1 to 3.8

Notes:

[1] Administration staff includes senior managers, managers, clerical & administrative.

[2] Clinical staff includes medical and dental staff, nursing staff (including learners), allied health professionals, healthcare assistants, and scientific, therapeutic & technical staff.

[3] Others includes maintenance & works, support and other staff.

[4] Based on un-rounded figures.

Sources:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Department of Health non-medical workforce census.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the current salary is of the Chief Executive of the Leicestershire Health Trust. [77948]

Mr. Lammy: The salary of the Chief Executive of the university hospitals of Leicester National Health Service Trust was published in the Trust's annual report and accounts for 2001–02 as being between £140,000 and £145,000.

Meals on Wheels

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were in receipt of meals-on-wheels in each of the last five years. [77995]

Jacqui Smith: In 2000–01 an estimated 212,000 clients received meals as part of community-based services provided or commissioned by councils with social service responsibilities (CSSR) based on the referrals, assessments and packages of care (RAP) return. Comparable data prior to 2000–01 are not readily available.

Mid Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects in-patient waiting lists in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area to fall below the level that they were at on 31 March 1997. [77156]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Mid Essex Hospitals National Health Service Trust achieved the 2001–02 plan ensuring that no patients were waiting more than 15 months for elective treatment. The trust also exceeded its elective activity while successfully managing an increase in emergency activity.

Currently Mid Essex Hospitals Trust is following government guidelines with robust delivery plans in place to reduce the waiting times for patients on the waiting list to a maximum of 12 months by March 2003.

Mixed Sex Wards

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are in mixed sex wards, broken down by trust. [74201]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect information on the number of national health service patients treated in mixed sex wards as opposed to single sex wards. NHS trusts are required only to report on total patient throughput per annum.

NHS (European Doctors)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 21 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 128W, if he will list the contracts signed by NHS trusts to bring teams of doctors from continental Europe to work in the NHS. [78199]

Mr. Hutton: Six contracts to bring over overseas clinical teams have been signed by national health service trusts: two each by Central Middlesex and East Somerset NHS Trust, and one each by South Tyneside Healthcare Acute Trust, and Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust. A short-term contract was also signed at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust.

NHS Direct

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average time it took to get through to NHS Direct was over *(a)* the last month for which figures are available and *(b)* the previous six months. [77141]

Mr. Lammy: The average time it took to get through to NHS Direct in September 2002 was 55.73 seconds. The figures for the previous six months are shown in the table.

Month	*Seconds*
March 2002	74.79
April 2002	61.42
May 2002	59.45
June 2002	69.37
July 2002	69.43
August 2002	66.87

Mr Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of nurses working on NHS Direct at each grade. [77603]

Mr. Lammy: At present, the number of nurses working on NHS Direct at each grade is not collected centrally. The nurse grade structure for NHS Direct mainly consists of F and G grade nurses offering medical advice. NHS Direct accounts nationally for around 1,100 (whole time equivalent) nurses, a small number against the overall size of the nursing workforce 346,000 -whole time equivalent—in England. The service had and will continue to follow a range of strategies to minimise the impact of its recruitment on other parts of the National Health Service.

NHS Trusts (Private Operation Bills)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have billed NHS trusts for operations carried out in the private sector; and how many of these were paid and at what cost. [78182]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* National health service trusts do not have the power to reimburse patients for operations they choose to have carried out in the private sector. Occasionally circumstances arise in which NHS trusts decide that it is appropriate, on a case by case basis, to make an ex-gratia payment in connection with such treatment. The Department does not hold information on the number of such payments, nor their costs.

NHS Vacancies (Mid-Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* nurse, *(b)* doctor and *(c)* consultant vacancies there were at Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford at the latest available date; [77142]

(2) how many *(a)* nurse, *(b)* doctor and *(c)* consultant vacancies there were in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust at the latest available date. [77143]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table. Vacancy information is not collected for specific hospitals, therefore vacancy information is shown for Mid Essex Hospital Trust.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2002(Vacancies in Mid Essex Hospital Services Trust, doctors, nurses and consultants

			Staff in post	
	Three month vacancy rate %	*Number of three month vacancies*	*Whole time equivalent*	*Head-count*
All medical and dental staff	3.1	0	110	160
All consultants	3.4	0	90	100
All other doctors and dentists	2.4	0	20	70
All nurses	1.6	20	1,290	1,720
All qualified nurses	2.2	20	880	1,170

Key notes:
1. Three month vacancy information is as at 31 March 2002.
2. Three month vacancies are vacancies which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
3. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post.

4. Three month vacancy rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey and the Consultant Census, March 2002.
5. Staff in post data are from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2001 and the Mini Consultant Census, March 2002.
6. Medical and dental figures exclude staff in training.
7. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
8. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.

Other notes:

9. Due to rounding, calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
10. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.

Sources:

Vacancy Numbers and Rates: Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2002 and Consultant census March 2002.
Non Medical Staff in Post: Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce census September 2001.
Medical and Dental Staff in Post: Department of Health Consultant census March 2002.

Nutrition

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the annual cost of under-nutrition to the NHS. [75701]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 October 2002]:* The number of finished consultant episodes (FCEs) of in-patient care in national health service hospitals in England in 2000–01 for malnutrition was 321. This figure does not represent the number of patients as a person may have more than one FCE in the year. This is the final figure.

This information is extracted from hospital episode statistics (HES) system which contains details of patients admitted to and treated in NHS hospitals in England. HES does not hold data on cost of treatment for malnutrition.

Occupational Therapy

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the underlying reasons are behind the change in the number of occupational therapy first episodes of care from 2001–02 to 2000–01. [78060]

Mr. Hutton: Table 2 of "Occupational Therapy Services, Summary Information for 2001–02", England, a copy of which is in the Library, indicates that referrals from some sources to national health service occupational therapy services fell while others rose. Information is not collected centrally on the reasons for these changes.

Older People (Care)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his oral statement on 23 July on older people's services, how many extra care home places will result from the plans he announced in each of the next three years. [78913]

Jacqui Smith: In the recently published national health service and social care planning guidance, "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: The next 3 years", the Government indicated a capacity assumption of an increase of 6,000 in the number of people in care homes supported by councils over the three years to 2006. We expect the majority of the places to be provided from April 2004 onwards.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his oral statement on 23 July concerning services for older people, for what reasons he estimates there was a reduction in the number of households receiving home care over the last five years. [78914]

Jacqui Smith: Home care is only part of the care and support provided through non-residential social services. This includes home helps and home care, community equipment and housing adaptations, occupational therapy, day care, and direct payments. We are committed to improving the provision of non-intensive care and support as part of better preventive services.

Organ Retention

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many organs are retained at Leicestershire hospitals from deceased persons. [77962]

Mr. Lammy: There are currently 153 organs retained by the three hospitals covered by the University Hospitals of Leicester National Health Service Trust. Their retention complies with the Department's rules on the removal, retention and use of human organs. We have recently consulted on revised procedures and protocols for the taking, storage and use of human organs and tissue, and a code of practice on the import and export of body parts. That exercise will lead to a new Bill on human tissue in due course.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 870W, on parliamentary questions, how many statistical tables requested by hon. Members in parliamentary questions have been placed in the Library and not been published in the *Official Report* this session. [78372]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 16 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 870W.

Patient Forums

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will be able to provide legal advice to patient forums; and whether it will be specifically funded to do so. [77423]

Mr. Lammy: The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will be able to provide legal advice to patients' forums. This is within the commission's function of providing advice and assistance to patients' forums.

It will be for the commission to determine how it spends the money allocated to it—this will be set out in the annual business plan that it produces.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide local premises for patient forums in England, and if he will make a statement. [77426]

Mr. Lammy: It is the responsibility of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health to decide where patients' forums in England, and the staff supporting them, should best be located to enable them to discharge their functions. To assist the commission in doing so, a change assessment group is being set up for each strategic health authority (StHA) area. It will comprise stakeholders such as the national health service, community health councils, local Government and local voluntary organisations; and will consider issues such as:

Mapping of how the NHS is arranged within the StHA area

Demography

Relationship between the NHS and local Government

Recruitment

ICAS provision

Accommodation.

All the information above will help to inform the commission where the most appropriate accommodation will need to be located—in terms of the NHS, the nature of populations, and in relation to other relevant services. It will also enable the commission to form a clear picture of the nature, type and volume of work that will need to be undertaken by the patients' forums for that area and by the staff supporting them.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of staff required to be employed in patient forums to replace community health councils; what his estimate is of the annual cost of running patient forums in England; and if he will make a statement. [77427]

Mr. Lammy: The final outcome of the current spending review is not yet known. It is therefore not possible to discuss detailed funding arrangements for patients' forums and the Commission for 2003–04.

The Commission's chair designate and her interim team, along with the Department, are still considering potential structures for the organisation of and staffing levels for patients' forums. The level of funding available for the Commission and patients' forums will be a key determinant of this, so, as yet, staffing levels have not been finalised.

It should also be noted that staff working in patient advice and liaison services, staff in local authorities supporting overview and scrutiny committees and other staff that will be commissioned by patients' forums to provide independent complaints advocacy support will also undertake some of the functions currently carried out by community health councils.

Patient Forums (Staffing)

Mr Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff that are currently employed by English CHCs are likely not to be employed by the new Patient Forums; and what redundancy schemes have been put in place for those staff. [77973]

Mr. Lammy: Recruitment of staff for patients' forums will be through open competition and will be organised by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health. It is therefore not possible, nor would it be appropriate, to predict who will secure positions and who will not.

The Department is working with the trade unions on the arrangements for Community Health Council (CHC) staff in the run up to the abolition of CHCs.

Patient Prospectus

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which PCTs will have distributed copies of the patient prospectus by the end of October; and if he will make a statement. [77992]

Mr. Lammy *[holding reply issued on Thursday 31 October]:* We do not have information as to which primary care trusts (PCTs) will have distributed copies of the patient prospectus by the end of October. We expect PCTs to have made the necessary arrangements to ensure delivery of the patient prospectus by the end of November. The Department produced guidance on compilation of the prospectus, and this has been available since July. It has also set up a 'Helpline' function, which has since August, been available to provide PCTs with advice about different methods of prospectus delivery. The Department in conjunction with the strategic health authorities, is continuing to oversee progress with general distribution.

Patient Prospectus Initiative

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Department has to evaluate the patient prospectus initiative. [77991]

Mr. Lammy *[holding reply issued on Thursday 31 October]:* The Department plans to evaluate the patient prospectus initiative by arranging;

a series of events at which it engages with a cross-section of patients and residents who are in receipt of the prospectus leaflet

meetings with representatives of primary care trusts who have participated in compiling the documents locally.

The above exercises are scheduled for completion by early in the new year. By taking part in these interface meetings, the Department is seeking to find out how the prospectus was received locally, and to gain feedback upon its utility. It will also use the information to inform plans for next year's prospectus and to consider potential improvements, for example to content, or in the provision of guidance material.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by each PCT on the patient prospectus initiative. [77993]

Mr. Lammy *[holding reply issued on Thursday 31 October]:* The Department does not hold information about primary care trusts' (PCTs) expenditure on the patient prospectus. It is for each PCT to make the appropriate arrangements to facilitate delivery of the prospectus.

Patients Forum (Staffing)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in English CHCs in each of the last three years; and what the projected number is of staff to be employed by the Patients Forum when they commence. [77969]

Mr. Lammy: Community Health Council (CHC) staff in England are employed by seven strategic health authorities and are National Health Service employees.

The figures requested are therefore not held centrally. There are currently approximately 700 staff in the 184 CHCs in England.

The chair designate of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health CPPIH) and her interim team, along with the Department, are still considering potential structures for the organisation of and staffing levels for patients' forums.

Pharmaceutical Industry

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects of paralliel trading in the British pharmaceutical industry; and if he will make a statement. [77480]

Mr. Lammy: Parallel imports are estimated to represent 15 per cent. overall of sales of medicines to the national health service, although the proportion of sales represented by parallel imports differs widely between different products. Conclusive information on the economic effect of this trade on the British pharmaceutical industry is not available, given the uncertainty surrounding such factors as the profits made on sales to the country which is the source of the imports and other discounts offered by manufacturers in the United Kingdom.

Residential and Nursing Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of time was that an individual stayed in *(a)* residential care and *(b)* nursing care in England in the last 12 months. [77145]

Jacqui Smith: The personal social services research unit, in research commissioned by the Department, estimated that the average complete length of stay of older publicly funded residents of residential and nursing homes is around 30 months. These data can not be broken down into types of home. This survey was carried out in the winter of 1995–96.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates his Department has made of the number of people who have had to sell their homes to pay for long-term care *(a)* over the last 12 months and *(b)* in each of the last five years. [77146]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not collected centrally. Through the introduction of the 12 weeks property disregard in April 2001 and the deferred payments scheme in October 2001, people have options to help them avoid having to sell their homes on admission to residential care.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential nursing home beds were available in each social service area in England *(a)* at the latest available date, *(b)* in October 2001 and *(c)* in October 1997. [77147]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of registered nursing home beds is collated as at 31 March each year.

Data by health authority at 31 March 2001 have been placed in the Library. These data for 2001 were published in a Statistical Bulletin—'Community Care Statistics 2001—Residential Personal Social Services for Adults, England'. This publication is available on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0129.htm.

Data by health authority at 31 March 1997 have been placed in the Library.

Data for 2002 are not yet available.

Single Mumps Vaccine

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the availability of the single dose mumps vaccine in the UK; [76297]

(2) whether the decision to remove the licence from the single mumps vaccine was taken at a ministerial level; and if he will make a statement. [77094]

Ms Blears: Single mumps vaccine is licensed in the United Kingdom, Mumpsvax, Aventis Pasteur MSD, but the marketing authorisation holder does not manufacture this vaccine for the UK market. The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) has taken no regulatory action against the marketing authorisation for this vaccine and the production and marketing of the vaccine is a matter for the company holding the marketing authorisation.

Importation of unlicensed single mumps vaccine is permitted in accordance with medicines legislation when it is supplied in response to a doctor's prescription, issued on his personal responsibility, to meet the special needs of an individual patient. The MCA will, however, object to importation of an unlicensed mumps vaccine if it has concerns over the safety or quality of the vaccine.

The Government recommend that children are vaccinated with the combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, as the safest way for parents to protect their children against these potentially very serious diseases, and has never recommended single mumps vaccine to be given routinely in the UK.

Suicide

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to tackle the problem of smoking in prisons. [77997]

Jacqui Smith: Individual prisons and their local national health service partners provide various services to help prisoners stop smoking. The range of services provided is determined locally. The Department is sponsoring pilots in five prisons to evaluate the effectiveness of smoking cessation services for prisoners and the best way of providing them.

TB

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra funding and resources he has allocated this year to local primary care trusts which have reported high rates of TB. [78187]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* An extra £400,000 will be made available this year to target primary care trusts with higher than average tuberculosis levels.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has offered to local primary care trusts who have high rates of TB to help them combat this disease. [78186]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Plans for a national strategic action plan for tuberculosis (TB) have been under discussion this year, and have moved forward more quickly under the auspices of the Chief Medical Officer's strategy "Getting ahead of the Curve" which identified TB as one of the key areas for public health improvement. We have held two national conferences with health care professionals, comments from which will help refine and finalise the TB action plan by the end of this year. This plan will form the framework to be tailored to meet local levels of TB.

Waiting Lists

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons patients awaiting diagnostic tests such as gastrointestinal endoscopy are excluded from national cancer waiting lists published by the NHS. [75770]

Ms Blears: Information is not collected centrally on waiting times for diagnostic tests. Currently published cancer waiting times data include patients urgently referred by their general practitioner (GP) with suspected cancer to first outpatient appointment. This data shows whether a patient was seen in secondary care within two weeks but does not contain information on whether a patient was referred direct for a diagnostic test or for assessment by a specialist. Data are also published on the target of a maximum one-month wait from urgent referral to first treatment for testicular cancer, children's cancers and acute leukaemia. This data will include time for the diagnostic phase but does not contain data on waiting times for individual diagnostic tests. Data is also published on the maximum one-month wait from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer. This target measures the waiting time to treatment after the diagnosis has been made. By 2005 there will be a maximum two-month wait from urgent GP referral to first treatment for all cancers.

Written Consultations

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in what format his Department has published the results of its 2001 written consultations; [69854]

(2) how long the Department allowed for consultation on each consultation document it published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form; [70089]

(3) whether consultation documents published by his Department in 2001 carried the consultation criteria as recommended in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations; [70090]

(4) how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form his Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [69855]

Mr. Lammy: The Department issued 67 consultations in 2001, of which eight had periods given for response of less than 12 weeks. All consultation documents were available in printed form on request, and since March 2001, the results of all consultations have been available on the Department's website.

The Department has since reviewed its arrangements and has circulated guidance to all managers, which has been drawn to the attention of all staff. In addition, all consultations will now automatically be posted on the Cabinet Office website at UK Online.

The Department's consultation co-ordinator is Peter Allanson, Head of Corporate Development, Nursing Directorate.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements will be made, and for how long, to ring fence public health laboratory budgets when the service is reorganised to the management of local hospital trusts; [74814]

(2) what transitional funding arrangements will be in place for the Public Health Laboratory Service during its reorganisation. [74809]

Ms Blears: Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) laboratories transferring to the national health service will receive funding from the NHS and from the proposed Health Protection Agency for their diagnostic work. Traditionally, some of PHLS's core funding has supported the routine services provided to NHS trusts. In 2003–04, transferring PHLS laboratories will receive payments, to be known as "residual subsidy", to cover this support. For 2004–05 the subsidy will be passed to primary care trusts as part of general allocations, and contracts between NHS trusts will operate on a full cost recovery basis.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

1901 Census Website

Ian Lucas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the 1901 Census website. [78513]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The 1901 Census website went back online as a test site on 27 August 2002. Up to 21 October over 1.4 million people have visited the site. They have conducted 14 million searches and downloaded 600,000 images of the census pages.

Firefighters' Strike

Mr. Evans: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what preparations she has made to ensure the safety and continuity of service to the public in the event of a firefighters' strike. [77668]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for Local Government (Greenwich and Woolwich) on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 527W.

Legal Aid

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many applications for legal aid have been refused since the new rules were introduced. [77847]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Following the implementation of the Access to Justice Act 2000, which led to the creation of the Community Legal Service on 1 April 2000, 61,921 applications for civil legal representation have been refused up to and including March 2002. However, some of these applications may have gone on to be granted following an appeal.

It is not possible to provide figures for the number of refused applications for legal help as the decision to grant legal help rests with the Legal Services Commission's suppliers.

Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been spent in recruiting staff to his Department in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south east in each year since 1997. [78559]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The table provides the information requested, where it is available.

	2001–02	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*
Recruitment (admin costs)					
South Eastern	17,700	18,600	13,800	10,700	0
CSHQ (London)	75,900	40,700	20,000	71,800	15,000
LCD HQ (London)	195,402	325,767	217,442	148,530	113,473
Total	[1]289,002	385,067	251,242	231,030	128,473
Recruitment (staff costs)					
South Eastern	373,151		[2]—		
CSHQ (London)	[3]—				
LCD HQ (London)	24,683				
Total	397,834				
Public Guardianship Office (London)[4]	121,654	173,737	11,376		

[1] 2001–02 on accruals basis.
[2] Information not available.
[3] Included in figures for South Eastern.
[4] Admin and paybill costs combined.

Mr. Key: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress she has made on reorganisation of magistrates' courts in Wiltshire; and if she will make a statement. [72612]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* I am still considering the representations made to me by the Wiltshire county council and the Wiltshire Magistrates Committee at a meeting together with the hon. Member for Westbury.

I will write to the hon. Member once I have made my decision on the appeal against the closure of the Courthouses at Trowbridge and Devizes.

TREASURY

Currency Transfers

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what research he has commissioned regarding the transfer of currency across national boundaries using electronic technology; and if he will publish the results of this research; [79100]

(2) what research his Department has commissioned into bank charges for the transfer of currency across national boundaries in the European economic area. [79101]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has not commissioned any research into bank charges for the transfer of currency across national boundaries in the European economic area or the transfer of currency across national boundaries using electronic technology.

Discretionary Trusts

Pete Wishart: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer how many discretionary trusts there are in the UK. [79353]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested is not available.

Economic Cycle

Mr Howard: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumption his Department has made regarding the end date of the current economic cycle; and if he will make a statement. [78649]

Ruth Kelly: Budget 2002 (HC 592) included an assessment of cyclical developments, in particular on pages 26 and 190 to 193. This assessment will be updated in the forthcoming pre-Budget report.

Economic Growth

Mr. Clappison: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to amend his growth forecasts in line with the recent forecast from the International Monetary Fund. [78836]

Ruth Kelly: The Government will publish an updated forecast for the UK economy in the forthcoming pre-Budget report.

Equitable Life

Mr. Clappison: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his Answer of 22nd October, *Official Report*, column 220W, on the Penrose inquiry, what criteria have been established in respect of decisions to withhold publication of Lord Penrose's report on legal and commercial grounds; and who will apply such criteria. [78892]

Ruth Kelly: It is our intention to make public as much as possible of the results of the inquiry. The presumption is that this will be the full report. However, much of the information being considered by the inquiry is subject to legal and commercial confidentiality restrictions, and such restrictions may also attach to information included in the report of the inquiry. It will not be possible to determine in advance of receiving the report from Lord Penrose whether any such restrictions prevent the report from being published in full.

Treasury Ministers will decide, on the basis of legal advice, whether it is possible to publish the whole of Lord Penrose's report within the restrictions relating to legal or commercial confidentiality.

Euro

Mr. Clappison: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what work is being undertaken by his Department in advance of a decision on whether to join the Eurozone; and if he will make a statement. [78883]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has said that it will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. The assessment has not yet started, but the necessary preliminary analysis technical work that is necessary to allow us to undertake the assessment within two years as promised is underway.

As we set out in the "Paper for the Treasury Select Committee on the Treasury's approach to the preliminary and technical work", issued on 6 September, "A number of supporting studies will be published encompassing the preliminary and technical work . . . When the assessment is complete, the detailed supporting studies will be published alongside, all to be subject to intensive public scrutiny and debate." More detail on the supporting studies is given in the 6 September paper.

GDP Estimates

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) for what reason gross domestic product estimates for the countries and regions of the United Kingdom are two years behind United Kingdom gross domestic product estimates; [79325]

(2) when gross domestic product estimates will be made for each country and region of the United Kingdom for 2000; [79324]

(3) what the gross domestic product per capita was of each country and region of the United Kingdom in *(a)* the most recent year and *(b)* each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [79323]

Ruth Kelly: The answer requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 4 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your three recent questions on

(a) the timing of publication of gross domestic product estimates for the countries and regions of the United Kingdom; (79325)

(b) the date for the publication of estimates of gross domestic product for the countries and regions of the United Kingdom for the year 2000; (79324)

(c) what the gross domestic product per capita was of each country and region of the United Kingdom in *(a)* the most recent year and *(b)* each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. (79323)

(a) Currently the latest available estimates for the Gross Value Added (GVA*) for the countries and regions of the United Kingdom are for 1999. This publication lag is longer than usual and has been caused by the ONS completing an exceptionally demanding work programme to include a number of new and revised data sources. This additional work led to a deferral of the publication of estimates of GVA from their planned release date in May 2002 and the reasons for this deferral were covered in a ONS News Release of 21 May 2002.

More usually, estimates of GVA below UK level are published some three to four months after the UK-level estimates are released. One of the main reasons for this delay is to ensure that the sub-UK estimates are consistent with (i.e. add up to) those published in the United Kingdom National Accounts. We plan to meet that goal this year by publishing estimates for the period up to 2001 before the end of 2002.

(b) The ONS announced in the August edition of Updates that Regional Gross Value Added is to be published for the years 2000 and 2001 on 17 December 2002.

(c) The estimates of GVA per head for the countries and regions of the United Kingdom for the period 1989 to 1999, consistent with the National Accounts data published in 2000 are shown in table A.

*While the estimates have been historically referred to as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), under the new European System of Accounts 1995 (ESA95) they are more correctly referred to as Gross Value Added (GVA) at basic prices. From 2002 onwards, the term GVA is being used.

Table A: Gross Value Added: £ person

	North East	North West (GOR) and Merseyside	Yorkshire and the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East	London
1989	6,614	7,199	7,042	7,621	7,242	9,012	10,135
1990	7,033	7,757	7,630	8,149	7,875	9,711	10,935
1991	7,433	8,096	8,002	8,464	8,108	9,913	11,422
1992	7,811	8,380	8,195	8,722	8,450	10,415	11,930

Table A: Gross Value Added: £ person

	North East	North West (GOR) and Merseyside	Yorkshire and the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East	London
1993	8,216	8,783	8,563	9,102	8,855	10,772	12,494
1994	8,441	9,248	8,901	9,519	9,352	11,467	13,088
1995	8,796	9,547	9,354	9,944	9,869	11,889	13,406
1996	9,111	9,980	9,927	10,673	10,309	12,582	14,107
1997[1]	9,301	10,494	10,541	11,371	10,845	13,657	15,266
1998[1]	9,741	10,909	10,983	11,848	11,455	14,530	16,532
1999[1]	10,024	11,273	11,404	12,146	11,900	15,094	16,859

United Kingdom

	South East	South West	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Excluding Extra Regio	Including Extra-Regio and stat. Discrepancy
1989	8,805	7,297	6,624	7,544	5,893	7,888	8,053
1990	9,586	7,917	7,080	8,321	6,300	8,535	8,712
1991	9,866	8,183	7,450	8,814	6,787	8,880	9,050
1992	10,242	8,547	7,632	9,217	7,163	9,236	9,404
1993	10,834	8,927	7,978	9,614	7,610	9,671	9,852
1994	11,441	9,311	8,393	10,168	8,114	10,170	10,372
1995	11,918	9,828	8,900	10,818	8,654	10,619	10,842
1996	12,761	10,351	9,240	11,162	8,964	11,185	11,462
1997[1]	13,634	11,008	9,562	11,429	9,507	11,871	12,118
1998[1]	14,510	11,447	10,063	12,117	9,754	12,548	12,750
1999[1]	15,098	11,782	10,449	12,512	10,050	12,972	13,213

[1] Provisional

National Insurance (Armed Forces)

Mr. Webb: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the periods in the last 30 years where the National Insurance Contributions regime for armed forces personnel were different to those that applied to ordinary employees, listing in each case *(a)* whether such arrangements were (i) voluntary and (ii) compulsory, *(b)* what rates of contribution applied, *(c)* whether separate rules applied to (i) men and (ii) women and *(d)* what benefits accrued in respect of these contributions. [77867]

Dawn Primarolo: *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Prior to 6 April 1996 serving members of Her Majesty's Forces paid National Insurance contributions at a reduced rate. The contributions paid built up entitlement to all contributory benefits although Contributory Jobseekers Allowance and Incapacity Benefit are not payable to serving members of Her Majesty's Forces. The amount of the reductions, which were compulsory, are shown in the table below.

	Reduction in weekly primary (flat rate) NICs			
Dates	*Men over 18*	*Women over 18*	*Men under 18*	*Women under 18*
2 October 1972 to 30 September 1973	0.11	0.08	0.06	0.05
1 October 1973 to 4 August 1974	0.09	0.07	0.05	0.04
5 August 1974 to 5 April 1975	0.07	0.05	0.05	0.04

	Percentage Reduction in Primary NICs	
Dates	*Standard Rate*	*Reduced Rate*
6 April 1975 to 5 April 1978	0.8	0.2
6 April 1978 to 5 April 1982	0.7	0.15
6 April 1982 to 5 April 1984	1.05	0.5
6 April 1984 to 5 April 1988	0.9	0.9
6 April 1988 to 5 April 1989	0.8	0.8
6 April 1989 to 5 April 1990	0.65	0.65
6 April 1990 to 5 April 1991	0.7	0.7
6 April 1991 to 5 April 1992	0.6	0.6
6 April 1992 to 5 April 1993	0.4	0.4
6 April 1993 to 5 April 1995	0.5	0.5
6 April 1995 to 5 April 1996	0.4	0.4

Savings Ratio

Mr. Clappison: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to increase the amount per capita that is saved ahead of retirement each year in the UK economy. [78834]

Ruth Kelly: There are a range of policies in place to encourage and enable people to save in pensions. We will publish a Pensions Green Paper later this year.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. McNamara: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer whether a person is eligible for working

families tax credit, when reapplying, if their average weekly hours worked falls below the 16 hour threshold as a result of the person taking two weeks' paid leave. [77820]

Dawn Primarolo: If average weekly hours worked fall below the 16 hour threshold, then a person is not eligible to claim WFTC. Where a person has a "recognised cycle of work" then any periods of paid leave are omitted from the calculation of average hours worked.

Where there is no "recognised period of work" then the actual hours worked in the five weeks preceding the date of claim are used to calculate eligibility. Longer periods of time preceding the week of the claim may be looked at if this enables the person's average weekly hours to be determined more accurately.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to simplify the claim form for working families tax credit; and if he will make a statement. [79230]

Ruth Kelly: From April 2003 Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC), Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC) and Children's Tax Credit will be replaced by Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

The forms for claiming the current tax credits are being replaced by one new form.

Filling in the form is a one-off exercise to get people into the new system. Renewal forms will include much of the information already provided by the claimant(s), so people will only have to update or confirm their circumstances and report their last year's income, rather than fill in a form starting from scratch.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Civil Relationships Registration

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress of her Department's review on registration of civil relationships. [78354]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Civil partnership registration, and associated rights and responsibilities, raise a number of complex issues which have prompted a growing debate within society. The Government are watching this debate with interest.

These issues have potentially significant financial and administrative implications. The Government are now examining the issues in detail. My Department co-ordinates this work across all those Government Departments that have an interest.

The Government cannot determine its response to any proposal for change before the completion of this work.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the United Kingdom's foreign direct investment share of the EU was in 2001; and if she will make a statement. [75123]

Ms Hewitt: Figures for 2001 published in September by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) confirm the UK's premier position in Europe. The UK had $496,776 million stock of inward investment, second only to the US. I welcome the UNCTAD findings. These reflect the hard work done by My Noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment, Invest-UK in British Trade International and the Regional Development Agencies in seeking out inward investment in these more difficult conditions and promoting the UK as a top venue. A recent example of this work is the announcement by the ICT Group of Pennsylvania of plans to open a new customer contact centre in Uxbridge, West London creating over 200 jobs.

Beryllium

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 22 October, *Official Report*, column 247W, on beryllium, what written assurances were given in relation to the use of beryllium by the University of Sciences and Technology in Iran. [78876]

Nigel Griffiths: The written assurances that were given in relation to the use of beryllium by the University of Science and Technology were consistent with the model format published on the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation website.

The website address is http://www.dti.gov.uk/export.control

Citizens Advice Scotland

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the recent Quinquennial Review of Citizens Advice Scotland. [79401]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The review, which started in December 2001, was recently completed and the subsequent report produced by our consultants was extremely positive about both CAS and the CAB service in Scotland. The report concluded that CAS is an organisation that represents significant value for money, has seen a radical improvement in its governance and organisation over the last five years and is making a very useful contribution in terms of the modernisation and e-Government agendas.

The review demonstrates that both CAS and the CAB service make a significant and positive contribution to individuals and communities in Scotland and Government in all areas and are performing well. The report gives some useful examples of this contribution.

I am arranging for a comprehensive summary of the report, its findings and recommendations to be made available on the DTI website. Copies of the full report will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Commercial Kiosk Service, Cornwall

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the trials will begin in Cornwall of the new Commercial Kiosk Service; how long the trial is due to last; which companies will be providing the *(a)* hardware, *(b)* software and *(c)* training of staff; and if she will make a statement. [77785]

Mr. Timms: The hon. Member should approach e-Daily, the company behind the proposed commercial kiosk pilots, in order to obtain information about its plans.

The company's address is:

The Lansdowne Building
2 Lansdowne Road
Croydon
Surrey CR9 2ER
(Tel: 07949 189330)

Exhibitions Abroad

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* budget allocation and *(b)* staff allocation is for the Support at Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad section; and if she will make a statement. [78104]

Ms Hewitt: Trade Partners UK's International Business Schemes run the Support for Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad (SESA) scheme, the Inward Mission scheme and a programme to improve sponsor performance. It has a total budget of £20 million for the financial year 2002/2003 and a staff allocation of 26.5.

Expo 2000

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what costs were incurred relating to the British pavilion at Expo 2000; and if she will make a statement. [75122]

Ms Hewitt: The Government provided £7.5 million to fund the UK pavilion at Expo 2000 in Hanover.

The UK pavilion attracted 2.6 million visitors over five months and took 1,242 trade enquiries. The pavilion itself was designed to have an after-life in the spirit of Expo's theme of sustainability.

Export Development Counsellors

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export development counsellors recruited from the private sector were in place in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; and if she will make a statement. [78112]

Ms Hewitt: The number of export development counsellors in post is as follows:

1997–98: 78
1998–99: 87
1999–2000: 83
2000–01: 86

The current number of international trade advisers from the private sector (formerly export development counsellors) in post is 123.

Export Market Information Centre

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* operating costs and *(b)* number of visits were for the Export Market Information Centre in London is in *(i)* 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–01; what research of customers took place in each of those years; what costs were incurred by that research; and if she will make a statement. [78103]

Ms Hewitt: Operating costs (including Information Resources) and visitor numbers for the years in question were as follows:

	Approximate costs (000) (Running costs and information resources)	*Personal Visitors*
1997 to 1998	1,423	24,067
1998 to 1999	1,151	22,597
1999 to 2000	1,298	18,167
2000 to 2001	[1]1,974	12,332

[1] In 2000–01 the Export Market Information Centre was renamed the Trade Partners UK Information Centre and Enquiry Service with the additional role of handling telephone and e-mail enquiries for the organisation. The new unit handled over 36,000 telephone enquiries and 3,000 e-mails in 2000–2001, or a total of 50,000 transactions, the highest figure since 1997–1998.

Customer Surveys were conducted on behalf of the Centre in December 1997, November 1998 and November 1999. The total cost of the three surveys was approximately 60,000.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive on the impact of GATS on health services in Scotland; [76658]

(2) what procedures she has put in place to ascertain the views of the health service in Scotland on the possible impact of GATS; [76659]

(3) what discussions she has had with *(a)* the Scottish Executive and *(b)* principals and vice chancellors of Scottish universities on the impact of GATS on universities and other institutes of higher education in Scotland. [76670]

Ms Hewitt: Public services (i.e. services supplied in the exercise of governmental authority) such as in health and education are excluded from the GATS. The GATS defines these as services supplied neither on a commercial basis nor in competition with other service suppliers. For services within the scope of the GATS (that is, those supplied by the private sector), countries can choose in which sectors to make, or not make, commitments and any limitations or conditions they wish to impose.

The United Kingdom has already made GATS commitments, allowing foreign companies to provide private services in the UK in the health and education area. The Government have made clear to the House in the past that we will not make further commitments that could call into question our continued ability to maintain public health and education services.

My Department has recently issued a consultation document inviting views on requests for liberalisation of services that we have received in the current round of GATS negotiations. The document was drawn up in close co-operation with the Departments of Health, and Education and Skills, with input from the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations. Comments are requested by 3 January 2003. My noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment has written to all Members drawing attention to this consultation. The document is available on the DTI

website www.dti .gov.uk/worldtrade/service.htm and printed copies are being placed in the Libraries of the House.

DTI and DFES officials are in close contact with universities and higher education institutions and the Scottish Executive is also keeping in touch with Universities Scotland on issues related to GATS.

Government Expenditure

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the Government funding of £35.1 million over four years in the 1998–99 publication Trade and Industry; The Government's Expenditure Plans, Sectoral Activities section 1.2 has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent; which projects received funding, with the amount allocated per project; which projects were refused funding; and if she will make a statement. [77903]

Ms Hewitt: In May 1997, the Government allocated £35.1 million to the 186 winning bids which resulted from the sector challenge initiative. The budget was derived from both DTI's own funds and contributions from other Government Departments. The winning projects were recommended for support by an independent assessment panel and represented £109.5 million in total budget costs.

The winning bids were judged by their respective bidders to be focused on:

	Percentage
People/skills issues	65
Improving access to markets	64
The better exploitation of technology	55
Improving access to finance	11
Representation at trade fairs	4

To reduce the burden on business, the competition was divided into an outline and a full proposal stage. Some 605 outlines were received by the deadline of 13 November 1996. These were judged by an independent assessment panel against the criteria of impact, strategic fit, relevance, quality of content, partnership, value for money, additionality, financial viability and credibility.

340 bids were encouraged to proceed to the full bid stage and 307 full bids were received. From these, the 186 winners were selected.

Information Society Technologies Programme

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made by the Information Society Technologies programme; what costs have been incurred since its start up broken down by financial year; what the budget allocated was in each financial year; when the programme is due to finish; and if she will make a statement. [78108]

Mr. Timms: The Information Society Technologies programme within the EU's Fifth Framework Programme (FP5)—which finished in June 2002—was allocated a budget of €3.6 billion for the period 1998–2002. This budget, for the purpose of encouraging innovative research, development and demonstration projects in the IST area, has now been exhausted and UK companies, in competition with all other member and associated states, have won over £300 million of financial support (around 14 per cent. of the total disbursed) thereby meeting the target set in the 1998 Competitiveness White Paper to stimulate 'strong UK participation in the EU's Framework programmes'.

The indicative budget allocations for each year of FP5 were:

	€ billion
1999	1.31
2000	1.00
2001	0.85
2002	0.37

During the lifetime of the Fifth Framework Programme DTI funded the UK/SHELP service to provide a website, helpline, national contact point, literature and programme of promotional events to help UK organisations make successful applications for funding support. The annual cost of providing this service was:

	£000
November 1998 to March 2000	705
April 2000 to March 2001	511
April 2001 to March 2002	539
April 2002 to March 2003	441

Note:
Figures include VAT.

The EU will be launching the Sixth Framework Programme in November 2002. IST will again have a budget of 3.6 billion to cover the period 2002–06. DTI officials are currently considering how best to support UK organisations hoping to access this budget beyond March 2003.

DTI is ensuring that UK organisations have early access to all available information about the development of the FP6—by posting information on the UK/SHELP website (http://www.ukishelp.co.uk), holding information events and undertaking a programme of awareness-raising company visits.

The Libraries of the House have copies of recently written case studies about successful projects in the IST area, funded under previous European programmes, which demonstrate the potential gains ('European Programme Funding—Case Studies in Information Society Technologies').

Iran

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the level of *(a)* exports to and *(b)* imports from Iran was in 2001–02; and what steps she is taking to expand this trade. [78306]

Ms Hewitt: UK exports of goods to Iran in 2001 were worth £432 million while imports from Iran were worth £28 million. In the eight-month period from January to August 2002 UK exports of goods amounted to £283 million. UK imports were £26 million.

UK exports of services to Iran in 2001 totalled £126 million, imports from Iran were worth £31 million.

Trade Partners UK, including the commercial team at the embassy in Tehran, offers a strong package of support for British companies wishing to do business with Iran. In addition to providing up to date information on market conditions, they support a programme of trade missions to the market, help British groups attend key trade fairs, organise inward missions and provide targeted assistance to UK companies in key sectors.

Iron and Steel Employees Benefits Scheme

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent on the Iron and Steel Employees Re-adaptation Benefits Scheme in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–00 and *(c)* 2002–01; what the budget is for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [78290]

Alan Johnson: The current Iron and Steel Employees Re-adaptation Scheme (ISERBS) was introduced in May 2001 and the following amounts have been paid to eligible redundant steel industry workers:

	£
2001 to 2002	20,182,240
2002 to2003	[1]8,637,920

[1] by 12 November

of which approximately 45 per cent will be recouped from the European Commission The Government will continue to make ISERBS payments to eligible individuals as necessary.

Payments relating to the earlier ISERBS scheme, terminated in 1994, but under which there was residual commitment to pay a small number of individuals who attained entitlement in 1994 but whose redundancy was delayed, were as follows:

	£
1998 to 1999	193,689
1990 to 2000	103,713
2000 to 2001	NIL

Ironbridge Power Station

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with PowerGen over the future of coal-fired power stations in England, with particular reference to Ironbridge Power Station. [78753]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary for Trade and Industry has not had any recent discussions with Powergen about the future of Ironbridge or other coal fired powered power stations in England.

Joint Export Promotion Directorate

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* DTI, *(b)* FCO, *(c)* other Government Departments, *(d)* secondees and *(e)* other staff work within the Joint Export Promotion Directorate; and if she will make a statement. [78113]

Ms Hewitt: The Joint Export Promotion Directorate no longer exists. It is incorporated into British Trade International (BTI) in May 1999. BTI is the joint DTI and FCO body responsible for trade development and promotion of inward investment. The breakdown of staff currently working for British Trade International is as follows:

	Number of staff
DTI (HQ)	704
FCO (HQ)	52
OGD plus Government Office	162
Secondees	75
Overseas in staff years	1,522
UK	161

Process Improvement Master Class

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other support was provided for the Process Improvement Master Class in *(i)* 1998–99, (ii) 1999–00 and (iii) 2000–01; what budget there is for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [78262]

Ms Hewitt: The Process Improvement Master Class (PIMC) is one of the products offered by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Industry Forum, whose remit is to help small and medium enterprises improve their productivity. PIMC was developed for the automotive sector, but has also been used in the aerospace sector.

The amount of financial support provided for PIMC by my Department is shown in the table:

	£ million
1998–99	1.391
1999–2000	1.613
2000–01	2.298
2001–02	1.317

My Department also provided a secondee, at HEO level, to SMMT Industry Forum over this period.

Productivity Gap

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress she is making on putting policies in place to narrow the productivity gap relative to other industrialised countries. [75912]

Ms Hewitt: Following the reviews of my Department's priorities and structure and business support, major changes in the Department took place in April this year geared to focusing policies more effectively on raising the UK's competitiveness and productivity, in particular by focussing on successful businesses, world class science and innovation, and fair markets,

As part of the evidence base used to monitor progress I have also published on 15 October-the "Productivity and competitiveness indicators—update 2002". This publication benchmarks the UK's performance in each of the five drivers of productivity against that of our competitors.

Rural Transfer Advisors

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many rural transfer advisors are in place; what plans she has to increase this number; what their objectives are; who is managing them; and if she will make a statement. [77484]

Mr. Timms: There are currently 31 rural transfer advisers (28 full time equivalent.) They have been appointed by Post Office Limited (POL) to prevent avoidable closures in the rural network. Rural transfer advisers are employees of POL Staffing levels are a matter for POL, dti Department of Trade and Industry

Small Business Service

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 248W, on the Small Business Service, which of the targets to be achieved by 31 October have been met. [78434]

Nigel Griffiths: The SBS launched the "Bridges" community development venture fund early in May 2002.

The six Investment Readiness demonstration projects were under way by September 2002.

A National Start-up Forum has been established and considered an outline Action Plan at its first meeting in September. The forum will consider a final version at its second meeting in November with a view to publication of the Action Plan in December.

The SBS strategy for the years 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be published in November.

Trade Fairs (Promotion)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what programmes she has to promote and disseminate information about forthcoming trade fairs and exhibitions in the UK to potential trade visitors from overseas; and how much such programmes have cost in the past 12 months. [77026]

Ms Hewitt: Trade Partners UK (TPUK) promotes forthcoming trade fairs and exhibitions in the UK through the trade fairs and exhibitions website, which is managed by Exhibition Audience Audit (EAA) and sponsored by TPUK at a cost of £2,025 per quarter (£8,100 per year). The website offers a comprehensive listing of all the consumer, public, industrial and trade exhibitions to be held in major venues around the UK.

The monthly TPUK magazine Overseas Trade, distributed to some 36,000 business readers around the world, includes a page of diary dates with a specific section on UK-based events. The annual budget for the magazine is £240,000.

The TPUK Inward Mission Scheme is another effective way of strengthening UK activity overseas. It enables overseas buyers, journalists and business leaders to visit the UK's trade fairs, exhibitions and individual businesses. The annual cost of this scheme is some £400,000.

TRIPS Implementation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to extend the TRIPS implementation deadlines for all developing countries. [78204]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* The TRIPS agreement lays down procedures for extending implementation deadlines for the Least Developed Countries (LDC). The general implementation deadline is 2005 but an extension to 2016 was agreed for pharmaceutical products at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha. There is no specific mechanism for extending TRIPS implementation deadlines for all developing countries.

The UK Government work through the EU on issues relating to the TRIPS agreement. The UK Government support the development of objective criteria to form the basis upon which extensions of TRIPS transition periods should be agreed. The UK Government therefore support the introduction into TRIPS of a mechanism for extending transition periods for individual developing countries.

Work Permits (IT Workers)

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many work permit holders given leave to enter the United Kingdom in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 were employed in the IT sector; and what proportion of IT workers employed were admitted for the purpose of taking up a job in the sector. [77936]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

The total number of work permits issued in respect of information technology (IT) workers in 2000 and 2001 is 18,257 and 26,870 respectively, of which 12,548 and 15,976 respectively were issued prior to entry to the United Kingdom. Labour Force Survey figures for the total number of people employed in computer services are 500,000 in 2000 and 547,000 in 2001.

Pharmacy Dispensing Contracts

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average value of a pharmacy dispensing contract when traded between owners has been in the last two years. [77239]

Jacqui Smith I have been asked to reply. The information requested is not collected centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 5 November 2002

CABINET OFFICE

Correspondence

Bob Spink: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will ensure that a reference number and, where appropriate, the name and address of the constituent concerned is given in correspondence with hon. Members from Government Departments. [79040]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office document "Handling Correspondence from Members of Parliament: Guidance to Departments" sets out the principles Departments should follow when replying to correspondence from MPs. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

The format of individual replies is a matter for the Minister concerned.

Focus Group Research

Mr. Graham Allen: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether commissions for focus group research by Government Departments are subject to competitive tender. [78415]

Mr. Alexander: Overall procurement policy is a matter for the Office of Government Commerce . I can answer for the practice only in the Cabinet Office, the Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA) and the Central Office of Information (COI).

The rules for procuring focus group research are the same as for procuring other types of service. In the Cabinet Office, commissions estimated to cost £10,000 or more are normally subject to formal competitive tendering. Commissions estimated to cost less than £10,000 are normally awarded following receipt of competitive quotations.

The GCDA does not commission focus group research. However the COI does, not on its own behalf but on behalf of its government clients. In such cases COI asks three of its roster of suppliers (appointed competitively under EC procurement rules) to submit proposals and costs; the supplier providing the best value for money proposal is appointed. On occasion, the client requires urgent research and COI appoints the roster supplier that it considers to be the appropriate agency for the work.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Norman Lamb: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to receive representations from non-governmental organisations as part of the interdepartmental discussions on Criterion 8 of the Consolidated Criteria relating to sustainable development being facilitated by his Office. [71536]

Ms. Hewitt: I have been asked to reply. I apologise for the delay in replying. The interdepartmental discussions on improving procedures for assessing relevant export licence applications against criterion 8 of the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria have already been completed. The results were published on 31 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 309 12W.

TRANSPORT

A21

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the local public exhibition of the revised proposals for improvements to the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury stretch is due to be held. [79413]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Archie Norman, dated 5 November 2002:

David Jamieson has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the exhibition of revised proposals for the improvement of the A21 between Tonbridge and Pembury.

The exhibitions are scheduled to be held on Friday 22 and Saturday 23 November at the Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls in Tonbridge. We shall be publishing a newsletter in the next few days which will give further details of the proposed on-line improvement and exhibition opening times. I will ensure that a copy is sent to you as soon as it is available.

We are also arranging for a preview of the exhibition for yourself and local councillors which will be at a separate venue to the main exhibition. We will write to you soon with an invitation when arrangements for that venue have been finalised.

Should you need any further details about the proposals, Peter Minshull, the Project Sponsor at the Agency's office at Dorking will be happy to discuss these with you. He can be contacted on 01306 878134.

Air Travel Trust Fund

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column 208W, what plans he has to introduce legislation to provide powers to impose a levy to recoup the costs of the Air Travel Trust Fund; what action he plans to take to defray their debts; and what contingency plans he has made to deal with the situation following the collapse of a travel company; and if he will make a statement. [78797]

Mr. Jamieson: As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport said previously, we will introduce a draft Bill to secure the necessary powers to impose a levy when a suitable legislative opportunity arises. The debts of the Air Travel Trust Fund (ATTF) are currently covered by a commercial loan backed by Government guarantee.

In the event of a collapse of a travel organiser which offers holidays including air travel, the Civil Aviation Authority would, under the terms of the Air Travel

Organisers Licence (ATOL) scheme, refund or repatriate those customers affected. The Government would ensure that any subsequent calls on the ATTF would be met.

Bus Passengers

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information is collated by his Department on bus passengers and bus passenger miles travelled in Greater London in each year since 1997; what estimate his Department has made for 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [79634]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department collects information on the number of bus passenger journeys made each year in Greater London, details are set out as follows:

In addition, the National Travel Survey collects information on the characteristics of bus passengers in Greater London (but excludes foreign tourists) and details of journey purpose and frequency.

Although not collected by the Department, details of the bus passenger satisfaction survey sponsored by Transport for London (TfL) are published by the Department each quarter in "Transport Statistics Bulletin: Bus Quality Indicators: England", which is held in the Libraries of the House.

The Department does not collect or collate information on bus passenger miles travelled in Greater London, although details can be found in the TfL publication, "Transport Statistics for London 2001" (also in the Library).

Bus passenger journeys in Greater London

Year	*Passenger journeys million*
19997–98	1,294
1998–99	1,279
1999–2000	1,307
2000–01	1,359
2001–02	1,434

Source:
Department for Transport annual survey of public service vehicle operators and Transport for London.

The Department has not made an estimate of passenger journeys or passenger miles in Greater London for 2003–04, although Transport for London has produced some estimates in its Business Plan available on the TfL web site at:
www.transportforlondon.gov.uk/tfl/reports library business.shtml

Car Number Plates

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is being taken to tackle illegal car number plate duplication. [79754]

Mr. Jamieson: We are taking active and immediate steps to tackle this difficult problem. The Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 contains measures to require all number plates suppliers in England and Wales to register with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). This requirement will come into force on 1 January 2003 and will ensure that in future number plates are only sold by registered suppliers to a purchaser who can show proof of entitlement to that registration mark and proof of their own identity. Records will be kept of all sales for inspection by police or local authority trading standards officers.

Since September 2001 all number plates issued have had to display the name and postcode of the supplying outlet.

Car Sharing

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage car sharing. [79335]

Mr. Jamieson: In August my Department published and disseminated to all local authorities and other major employers in England a guide on "Making travel plans work: lessons from UK case studies" which highlighted successful car-sharing schemes set up by employers as part of their travel plans. A copy of the guide is in the Library of the House. The Government will shortly be responding to the report commissioned by the Motorists' Forum on car sharing and car clubs in which we will set out our plans for further work to encourage car sharing.

Disused Railway Track Beds

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent in each of the past five years in *(a)* feasibility studies into the possible re-opening of disused railway lines and *(b)* re-opening closed lines. [79087]

Mr. Jamieson: Although the Strategic Rail Authority undertakes, from time to time, project development work including feasibility studies, it is not possible to identify readily those elements that relate specifically to the re-opening of railway lines. Feasibility studies are also undertaken by other stakeholders, including local authorities.

Inverness-Gatwick Link

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make a decision on the proposed public service obligation on the Inverness to Gatwick route. [79090]

Mr. Jamieson: *[holding answer 4 November 2002]*: Officials in the Department for Transport are working closely with colleagues in the Scottish Executive on proposals for public service obligations and other options for safeguarding vital regional air services. The Government will publish their conclusion in due course.

Inverness/London Air Service

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what resources he will allocate to a public service obligation for a regional air service between Inverness and London. [78776]

Mr. Jamieson: The current air services between Inverness and London operate without subsidy.

London Buses

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much investment in London Buses there was in each of the last ten years for which figures are available. [77895]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on investment in London bus services by bus operators is not available centrally, although between July 2000 and June 2002, bus companies operating in London introduced some 2,600 new buses.

Other investment in London Buses is set out in London Transport's Annual Report documents, which incorporate their audited accounts—copies of the accounts are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what route mileage was served, and how many passengers were carried, on London Buses in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [77896]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of bus passenger journeys and vehicle kilometres in London over the last ten years have been compiled from the Department's annual survey of bus and coach operators and information received from Transport for London (TfL). The figures include journeys on a small number of routes not contracted to TfL.

Year	*Passenger journeys million*	*Vehicle kilometres million*
1991 to 1992	1,149	316
1992 to 1993	1,129	330
1993 to 1994	1,117	343
1994 to 1995	1,167	356
1995 to 1996	1,205	353
1996 to 1997	1,242	342
1997 to 1998	1,294	362
1998 to 1999	1,279	358
1999 to 2000	1,307	366
2000 to 2001	1,359	373
2001 to 2002 [P]	1,434	380

[P] provisional figures.
Source: DfT and TfL

London Underground

Mr Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much investment there was in the London Underground, and how many passengers were carried, in each of the last ten years for which figures are available; [77894]

(2) what proportion of total investment in London Underground has gone into building the Jubilee line in each of the last ten years. [77899]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested on overall investment and passenger numbers is set out in London Transport's annual report documents, which incorporate their audited annual accounts.

The following table shows the proportion of overall investment that went into building the Jubilee Line Extension each year:

Year	*Percentage Proportion of investment*
1992 to 1993	9.2
1993 to 1994	33.2
1994 to 1995	42.6
1995 to 1996	48.8
1996 to 1997	56.4
1997 to 1998	49.5
1998 to 1999	37.7
1999 to 2000	60.3[1]
2000 to 2001	0
2001 to 2002	0

[1] London Transport's accounts for 1999–2000 included an estimated accrual for all Jubilee Line. Extension works to be paid in future years.

National Air Traffic Services

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the state of faults on the UK NATS website; and when the faults will be rectified;[R] [79443]

(2) what representations he has received from UK pilots who have to log onto the Swedish air traffic service in order to obtain UK NOTAM for safety and time critical information owing to faults on the UK NATS website.[R] [79442]

Mr. Jamieson: National Air Traffic Services Ltd. introduced a new on-line information system in late August, replacing the former manual system. The change was made after extensive consultation with users. The new system is intended to provide much wider access to pre-flight information, thereby enhancing safety, but some general aviation users who are accustomed to the manual system have not found it easy to adapt.

The system is provided with back-up facilities and, while—as with most other similar websites—it may be necessary to suspend operation for very short periods, I am assured that the continuity of service will not be significantly compromised.

Rail Freight

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what trials have taken place under the auspices of *(a)* the Strategic Rail Authority and *(b)* his Department relating to rail freight since June; what assessment is being made of these trials; when the outcomes of these trials are expected to be published; and if he will place related documentation in the Library; [78815]

(2) what the *(a)* agreed outputs, *(b)* type of scheme and *(c)* timetable for introduction are of the winning scheme under the Strategic Rail Authority's Logistics Competition by *(i)* Blue Circles Industries, (ii) Excel and (iii) Minimodal; what progress has been made; and what the timetable is for further implementation of the schemes as originally outlined; [78818]

(3) what the involvement of his Department was in the Strategic Rail Authority's Logistics Competition; and when trials of these schemes *(a)* were due to begin when the winners were announced and *(b)* will now begin; [78819]

(4) what representations have been received and what assessment has been made by his Department of the Strategic Rail Authority's cargo-sprinter train trials; what representations it has received; and what discussions the Department has held on the subject. [78816]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA's press release, issued on 13 June 2000, provides a description of each scheme. The agreed outputs of the SRA's Logistics Competition are part of the contracts between the applicants and the SRA signed in January 2001 and are commercially confidential.

The wagons and inter-modal units for the Blue Circle Industries project were delivered this summer, with trials commencing in September. A prototype container was produced in spring 2002 for the Minimodal scheme, with trials taking place during the summer. The first trials of the Exel scheme were completed in July-August 2001 with the second trials completed in spring this year. This project has now been completed and Exel are due to provide a final report for publication by the end of the year. Once published this and the reports of the other two schemes will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

My Department has received a number of representations about the competition and is kept informed on its progress by the SRA, but it has not been involved in the assessment of any of the entries or subsequent trials. The SRA is not assessing the trials, as the aim of the competition was to fund companies to take forward their projects and undertake commercial trials in order to demonstrate the concept to the market.

Rail Services

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much investment there was in the London rail commuter services in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; how many passengers were carried; and how many accidents there were in each of those years. [77897]

Mr. Jamieson: Since many rail investment projects benefit more than one part of the country, it is not possible to provide an accurate regional breakdown of total rail investment. The table shows, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, the amount of public service obligation grant paid to British Rail in respect of its Network SouthEast (NSE) sector; and, for each of the six years from 1996–97 to 2001–02, Government support paid to London & South East (L&SE) train operating companies (TOCs):

	£ million cash prices
1992 to 1993	525
1993 to 1994	372
1996 to 1997	573[1]
1997 to 1998	464
1999 to 2000	271
2000 to 2001	175
2001 to 2002	90

Figures for Government support to L&SE TOCs in 1994–95 and 1995–96 are not readily available.

[1] Support for Passenger Rail Services paid by the Franchising Director to British Rail, and from the point of franchise to private sector franchisees, in respect of L&SE TOCs.

Details of passenger numbers on British Rail's NSE sector in 1992–93 and 1993–94 are not readily available. For details of passenger numbers on L&SE TOCs from 1994–95 onwards, I refer the hon. Member to the latest (September 2002) edition of the Strategic Rail Authority statistics bulletin "National Rail Trends," copies of which are available in the House Library. Table Lib on page 4 shows passenger kilometres, and Table 1.2b on page 7 shows passenger journeys, travelled on those TOCs.

The Health and Safety Executive, the rail safety regulator, produces accident data covering the national network and does not produce data on a regional level. Accident statistics for the national network covering the last ten years are in the annual reports of HSE's railways inspectorate, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents there have been on *(a)* the London Underground and *(b)* the London rail commuter services in each of the last ten years for which figures are available. [77898]

Mr. Jamieson: Statistics on accidents on the London Underground and the national rail networks are given in the annual report of HM Chief Inspector of Railways, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Recruitment (Over-50s)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of new recruits to his Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79305]

Mr. Jamieson: The percentage figures for each year for new recruits aged 50 and over in the period requested is as follows for DETR(C) April 2000 to March 2001 and DTLR(C) April 2001 to March 2002.

Period	*Percentage*
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	7.2
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	6.5

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many individuals have been seconded to senior civil servant positions in his Department, in each case listing *(a)* from which organisation, *(b)* duration to date and planned duration of the secondment and *(c)* source of current salary in the secondment post. [79160]

Mr Jamieson: None.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many senior civil servants are seconded from his Department, in each case listing the *(a)* location, *(b)* duration to date and planned duration of the secondment and *(c)* source of the salary in the secondment post. [79161]

Mr. Jamieson: One member of my Department's senior civil servants has just taken up a six month secondment to the South East England Development Agency.

The Department normally expects the host organisation to cover the salary costs of staff on secondment.

Train Services (Midlands)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the reliability and punctuality of train services between Worcester and Birmingham via Droitwich Spa and Hartlebury. [79489]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority publish performance statistics for all train operating companies in their quarterly "National Rail Trends" publication. The figures for each operator are not broken down to route level, but reflect the performance of their services in aggregate. The most recent edition was published on 12 September. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Trains (Bicycle Carriage)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1)how many bicycles were carried by train by each train operating company in each year since 1996. [79672]

(2) how many bicycle spaces were provided on the railways *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* in 1996; and how many bicycles were carried by train by each train operating company in each year since 1996. [79671]

(3) which train operating companies have increased the number of bicycle spaces on board their rolling stock since 1996. [79673]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on the number of bicycles carried each year is not held. There is no method by which this can be monitored, as passengers with bicycles do not necessarily need a reservation, or in most cases even a ticket because the majority of train operators do not make a charge for the carriage of bicycles.

Transport Plan

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for his Department's forthcoming report on the Ten Year Transport Plan to include *(a)* a definition of congestion with benchmark figures and interim targets for its reduction, *(b)* a commitment for the multi-modal studies to be completed by March 2003 with a plan of action to be agreed within six months of completion, *(c)* interim targets for delivery of *(i)* new trunk and *(ii)* local road improvements to 2006 and *(d)* a commitment to publish annual progress reports on the implementation of the measures set out in the Plan; and if he will make a statement. [78896]

Mr. Jamieson: The report will include a full up-date on progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the 10 Year Plan.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Members' Access

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the arrangements made to ensure hon. Members have access to the House at all times. [78754]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Hon. Members have access to the House at all times. In recent months additional security measures have been adopted on the advice of the Security Service and the Metropolitan Police. These are designed to enhance protection for all those who use the building, commensurate with current threat assessments. The Serjeant at Arms is available at all times to discuss issues of access and security with hon. Members.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Parliamentary Questions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 871W, if he will make a statement on the printing of answers to questions during the summer recess in a special edition of the *Official Report*; and what plans he has to repeat the exercise. [79555]

Mr. Robin Cook: The hon. Lady will recall that I welcomed her suggestion that answers normally given by letter during a recess should be printed in a special edition of the *Official Report*.

I am pleased to report that during the period of the summer recess, the Government answered a total of 1,418 questions, all of which were printed in *Hansard* for the convenience of all Members of the House.

I propose that, even with September sittings, we should continue this new system. [79555]

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

ADSL

Mr. Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to require the regulator to ensure that BT reduces the trigger thresholds for converting telephone exchanges to ADSL. [78760]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The rollout of BTs ADSL services., including deciding on trigger levels for enabling its exchanges to provide these services, forms a commercial decision to be taken by BT, As ADSL is not a service that BT is required by its Licence to provide, Oftel has no power to set the conditions under which BT should enable exchanges.

Both Liberty Broadband (at *http:/ Mrww.briiigingbroadband2youco.uk/*) and the East of England Development Agency (atttp:// www.broadbandbrokerage.com/bbb/) are also running demand registration schemes.

British Printing Industries Federation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much financial assistance has been given, broken down by financial year, to the British Printing Industries Federation; what future support they will enjoy; and if she will make a statement. [78309]

Mr. Timms: DTI does not provide direct financial assistance to the British Printing Industries Federation but has worked with this organisation in partnership with other industry members to support initiatives aimed at raising this sectors competitiveness and productivity.

In particular, my Department is currently working closely with the British Printing Industries Federation to take forward actions from "Print 21: coming of age?" the competitiveness study for the print industry, published in summer 2001.

Business Sector (West Midlands)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the business organisations in the West Midlands with which she makes it her policy to consult on matters of relevance to the business sector. [79490]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry meets with the chairmen of regional development agencies regularly and consults them on matters of interest to them and businesses in their regions. RDAs (which are business led and have 50 per cent. of members with a business background) have widespread links with businesses in each region and are well placed to reflect the business view.

In addition, the Department of Trade and Industry consults widely on specific issues, most recently on the review of its structure and currently on the Review of Business Support. Organisations consulted—and invited to progress meetings (the West Midlands as in other regions) include the CBI, engineering, Employers Federation, RDA, Business Links, Cambers of Commerce, Learning and Skills Councils, local authorities, universities, local enterprise agencies, trade associations, research and technology organisations and other business support bodies.

Capita

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many industrial tribunals involving Capita have taken place in the last five years. [78807]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* In the five-year period up to 30 September 2002 16 cases involving Capita came to a hearing at an Employment Tribunal in Great Britain

Source: Employment Tribunals Service

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the contracts for government work held by Capita. [78808]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Central records indicate that the department currently has one live contract with Capita Business Services, for the administration of the Construction Quality Mark Scheme.

Departmental Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been spent in recruiting staff to her Department in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south east in each year since 1997. [78558]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Information about the cost of centrally managed recruitment is as follows. It is not possible to distinguish between recruitment in London and in the south east.

Year	*£000*
1997–98	0
1998–99	136
1999–2000	490
2000–01	397
2001–02	117

Discrimination

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many legal claims of discrimination are estimated to have been made as a result of anti-discrimination regulations introduced since 1997. [78992]

Alan Johnson: Anti-discrimination regulations introduced since 1997 have amended existing legislation on race., sex and disability. Detailed information on which to base estimates of legal claims resulting specifically from such amendments is not available.

Energy Review

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has received a submission from the Scottish Executive with respect to the Government's review of future energy policy. [76912]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 October 2002]:* Scottish Ministers have submitted a response to the consultation for the Performance and Innovation Unit's "Energy Review". We understand that they see no need for a further formal response to the Government's current review of energy policy, but Scottish officials are working closely with my officials on Scottish aspects of the review.

International Energy Agency

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the IEA has met to discuss the possible scenarios arising from a conflict in Iraq; who the members of the IEA are; and if she will make a statement. [78289]

Nigel Griffiths: The International Energy Agency regularly discusses oil market issues in the Governing Board and in two committees, the Standing Group on the Oil Market and the Standing Group on Emergency Questions. Scenarios relating to a wide range of global issues, including the Middle East, are a normal part of assessment of oil market developments.

The International Energy Agency has 26 member countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States and Norway (Norway participates under a special Agreement). The European Commission also participates in the work of the IEA.

OPCW

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many industrial facilities the OPCW has inspected since its inception; and if she will make a statement. [78111]

Nigel Griffiths: The OPCW has produced figures for the total number of sites it has inspected which fall under the three Schedules in the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), or which are characterised as sites producing discrete organic chemicals (DOC). The figures available on the OPCW website are as follows:

	Total number of sites inspected
Schedule 1	34
Schedule 2	181
Schedule 3	91
Discrete organic Chemicals (DOC)	85

Note:
Figures as of 28 October 2002

All Schedule 2 and 3 and DOC sites are industrial, while Schedule 1 sites are mainly defence-related. All the Schedule 1 sites and some of the Schedule 2 sites have been inspected by the OPCW on a number of occasions. The inspections are a routine activity whose purpose is to check that the information which the sites have declared to the OPCW is accurate, and to confirm that the activities carried out at the sites are consistent with the CWC. All OPCW inspections carried out on sites in the United Kingdom have found them to be in compliance with the CWC.

Pharmacy Dispensing Contracts

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to receive the report of the Office of Fair Trading investigation into pharmacy contract limitations. [77261]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry expects to receive the report by the end of the year.

Porton Down and Shivenham

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the OPCW last carried out an inspection at *(a)* CBD Porton Down and *(b)* the Royal Military College of Science at Shivenham; if she will place the results in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [78110]

Nigel Griffiths: The OPCW last inspected *(a)* CBD Porton Down on 28–30 January 2002 and *(b)* the Royal Military College of Science at Shivenham on 23–25 July 2001. These were routine inspections under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The OPCW inspectors confirmed that there were no uncertainties regarding the United Kingdom's compliance with the CWC. My officials will consult the OPCW on whether a summary of their inspectors' findings can be placed in the Library. I will write to the hon. Member to confirm the outcome of these consultations.

Raising Finance Booklets

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the booklets on best practice on raising finance, "Money and Machines" and "Informed Investment in Modern Production Machinery" were reprinted. [78303]

Ms Hewitt: Since publication in 1995 "Money and Machines" has been reprinted on a number of occasions the last comprising a full revision in 1998. "Informed Investment in Modern Manufacturing Equipment" was published in 1998 and has neither been reprinted nor revised.

Regulations

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the costs to business of the regulations introduced by the Government since May 1997. [79079]

Nigel Griffiths: Estimates of the costs and benefits to business of the regulations introduced since May 1997 are shown in the published regulatory impact assessments, which are in the Libraries of the House.

Telemarketing

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to propose legislation to regulate the use of aggressive telemarketing techniques. [76613]

Mr. Timms: Unsolicited direct marketing by telephone has been subject to regulation in the UK since 1999, and there are also consumer protections if individuals enter into contracts during this kind of call.

The current regulations are the Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations 19995 which provide that individual subscribers who do not wish to receive this type of call can register with a central list—the Telephone Preference Service (TPS). Direct marketers are obliged to check that they do not call numbers on the TPS list when making unsolicited calls. Direct marketers are also obliged to take account of any requests not to call again that they receive direct from individual subscribers. Further details are available on the DTI website at the following URL:
http://www.dti.gov.uk/cii/regulatory/telecomms/telecommsergulations/ec telecomms data protection.shtml.

There will be an opportunity to review the way these regulations are working when we consult next year on implementation of the new version of the directive on which these regulations are based.

Organisations that market by telephone to individuals must also comply with the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 that came into force in October 2000. These regulations require those making unsolicited direct marketing calls to identify clearly the company they represent and the commercial purpose of the call at the beginning of the conversation. They also stipulate that the consumer has the right to receive clear information in advance of any decision to purchase, subsequent written acknowledgement of this information., and a seven-day cooling off period for most contracts agreed at a

distance. Further information is available on the DTI website at the following URL: http://www.dti.gov.uk/ccp/topics 1 /ecomm.htm.

Young Enterprise

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support her Department gives to Young Enterprise. [78481]

Nigel Griffiths: For the current academic year (August-July), the DTI is providing Young Enterprise with approximately £250k of support for their MasterClasses and Grauduate programmes and their Innovation Awards.

Your Guide

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent on the Your Guide project; and if she will make a statement. [77755]

Mr. Timms: The Your Guide pilot in Leicestershire and Rutland cost £30 million. Government provided £25 million and I understand that Post Office Ltd. provided in the region of £5 million.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AIDS (Africa)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she is giving to countries in Africa to help combat AIDS. [78926]

Clare Short: HIV/AIDS is one of the most important development challenges facing Africa. My Department committed over £180 million in HIV and sexual health programmes in Africa in 2001–02. DFID's overall programme in Africa is set to increase from £640 million to £1 billion by 2006, and HIV/AIDS will remain one of our highest priorities for the region.

Internationally, a further US $200 million has been pledged towards the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, £16 million to support the Microbicides for HIV Prevention Initiative, and £14 million to the IAVI (the international AIDS Vaccine Initiative). Considerable additional resources have also been committed to the United Nations and to civil society organisations to combat this disease and support those already living with it.

Agricultural Subsidies

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with her French counterparts regarding the impact of agricultural subsidies on development in poor countries; and what these discussions have achieved. [78669]

Clare Short: In June of this year, I wrote to all my EU counterparts on the subject of reform of the common agricultural policy, emphasising the need for this reform as well as for coherence between the objectives of our development co-operation and our other policies which affect developing countries.

The French Government responded positively, saying that they were in full agreement concerning poverty elimination and sustainable development. However, they indicated that agricultural questions were very complex in France, and that a coherent policy was vital.

In my Department, we are following these matters closely. In July, we took an initiative to invite representatives from all EU Governments to discuss "The Impact of CAP Reform on Developing Countries". These discussions will continue. There was a similar meeting in Bonn last month, which will be followed up with a further meeting in The Hague in January.

Burma

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of *(a)* the treatment of the Karen in Burma and *(b)* landmines in the Karen region. [78702]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

Ethnic minorities, including the Karen, suffer disproportionately from the human rights abuses carried out by the Burmese regime. Continued fighting between the Burmese army and armed Karen groups, which includes the use of mines by both sides, is the cause of on-going suffering among the ordinary people in Karen State.

HMG provides humanitarian assistance to Burmese refugees and those internally displaced, including the Karen.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions her Department has had with the Government of Burma. [78703]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

The European Union ban on high-level contact with Burma and our poor bilateral relationship with the Burmese military regime restrict discussions with the Burmese regime. Contact on important issues does continue. The most recent example of bilateral contact was discussions between embassy officials and Burmese officials regarding the International Code of Conduct against ballistic missile proliferation.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the UN about human rights violations in Burma. [78704]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

We have on-going dialogue with the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma and the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Burma about human rights abuses in Burma. Together with our European Union partners we annually co-sponsor resolutions on the human rights situation in Burma at both the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's response is to the recent UN report into the exploitation of the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of Congo by *(a)* the Democratic Republic of Congo, *(b)* Rwanda, *(c)* Uganda and *(d)* Zimbabwe. [78674]

Clare Short: We welcome the UN Panel report and are studying its allegations closely both within DFID and with other Departments in Whitehall. We are also considering a substantive response to the report's recommendations.

East Timor

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the humanitarian situation in East Timor; what financial support her Department provides to East Timor; and which organisations her Department supports that work in East Timor. [78705]

Clare Short: An assessment of the Humanitarian situation in East Timor is included in East Timor's National Development Plan, which was described in my answer to the hon. Member's previous question. Full details of my Department's financial commitments to East Timor between 1999 and 2005 are given in the following table:

£

Activity	*Commitment 1999–2005*	*Disbursed*
United Nations: 1999 ballot	800,000	800,000
Humanitarian and Emergency Relief	6,500,000	6,500,000
United Nations Transitional Administration	4,500,000	4,500,000
United Nations: Support for 2001 Elections	500,000	500,000
World Bank Trust Fund (infrastructure)	8,000,000	8,000,000
Support for Developing the National Development Plan (NDP)	300,000	(
NDP Implementation 2002–05	12,000,000	4,000,000
OXFAM: Human Resource Development	1,890,000	590,000
Civil Society and International NGOs	67,831	25,809
Local Civil Society Organisations	450,000	94,579
UK share of European Commission Expenditure, 1999–2005[1]	19,728,000	14,200,000
Total	54,735,831	39,210,388

[1] Estimated UK attribution at 19 per cent. of EC expenditure in East Timor

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on East Timor since its establishment as an independent sovereign state. [78714]

Clare Short: Newly independent East Timor faces a number of challenges. The Government have prepared an excellent National Development Plan (NDP), which describes how these challenges will be addressed. The new nation, however, lacks the financial and technical resources to implement the Plan. Until revenues from offshore oil and gas exploitation come on stream, expected to be in 2006–07, it will be reliant upon financial and technical support from the international community.

Donors have responded well and the NDP is fully financed for the next three years. It is only five months since independence and too early to judge the impact of the NDP. Initial activities have, however, started and Government, together with donors, will be reviewing progress later this month.

The UK contribution to the international effort on East Timor's development is described in my replies to the hon. Member's other questions on East Timor.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department is giving to East Timor in 2002–03. [78716]

Clare Short: This year my Department will provide grants worth £6.5 million to East Timor. The bulk of these funds, £4 million, is to help the Government of East Timor implement its National Development Plan. The balance comprises residual commitments to UN and World Bank Trust Funds established before Independence, plus £500,000 to support the activities of international and local Non-Governmental Organisations, including OXFAM.

In addition a proportion of the costs of the European Union assistance programme will be attributed to DFID, but it is too early to determine how much this will be in 2002–03.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of *(a)* the health situation, *(b)* the education situation, *(c)* the employment situation and *(d)* poverty alleviation in East Timor. [78717]

Clare Short: My Department, alongside the World bank and the United Nations, has provided technical advice to the Government of East Timor to help them develop their National Development Plan (NDP). The plan includes a full analysis of the social and economic challenges facing the new nation, including health, education, employment and poverty, and contains the Government's proposals for addressing these. Donors and the international community have commended East Timor on the quality of the plan.

Donors have pledged sufficient funds to fully implement scheduled NDP activities for the next three years. DFID has contributed £4 million to the NDP this year and expects to contribute a similar amount in each of the next two years.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to meet the Government of East Timor. [78720]

Clare Short: I met the Prime Minister of East Timor, Dr. Alkatiri, on 26 March this year, and Dr. Horta, the Foreign Minister, on 12 June. I have no further plans to meet members of the Government of East Timor in the current year.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with Christian Solidarity Worldwide concerning East Timor. [78971]

Clare Short: My Department has had no discussions with Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), nor have we received any proposals from them. The British embassy in Dili has had informal contacts with CSW.

East Timorese Refugees

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what she is doing about the East Timorese in refugee camps in West Timor. [78718]

Clare Short: My Department has not provided direct support to East Timorese refugees in West Timor. We have, however, provided £4.2 million to the United Nations Conflict Reduction and Prevention Unit, which is available for their programmes with refugees in West Timor.

Election Observers

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial support her Department provides to election observers; in which countries; and what guidance her Department issues to election observers. [78664]

Clare Short: DFID supports the electoral process in a number of ways in a number of developing and transition countries. In June 1998, DFID and the FCO published "Elections and the electoral process: a guide to assistance", which is available in the House of Commons Library and on our website.

Our support for election observers is usually provided in partnership with an international organisation such as the European Union or the Commonwealth who have developed their own guidance and training for observers.

Human Rights Projects

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects by which her Department promotes *(a)* the freedom of the press and *(b)* religious freedom in developing countries. [78671]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

(a) DFID supports the development of the media in a number of developing and transition countries, and published guidance on developing free and effective media to serve the interests of the poor in July 2001. Copies of "The Media in Governance" are available in the House of Commons Library and on our website. Our support aims to balance strengthening the capacity of the press and media to hold government to account with encouraging the press to meet their responsibilities of objective, constructive reporting.

(b) The objective of my Department is the elimination of poverty. Our central focus is therefore respect for the human rights of the poor. Frequently the poorest are ethnic and religious minorities that face discrimination and social exclusion. Our strategy on human rights is set out in "Realising human rights for poor people" published in October 2000.

Ivory Coast

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the recent ethnic strife in the Ivory Coast against the civilians from northern Daloa; and what discussions her Department has had with the overnment of the Ivory Coast on the subject. [78678]

Clare Short: We are working closely with others in the international community to help bring about a swift and peaceful resolution to the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire. We are aware of the reported attacks on civilians in Daloa. Together with our EU partners, we have called on the Ivorian Government to ensure respect for human rights, in particular with regard to civilian populations, and to bring to justice those responsible for any violations of those rights.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what guidance her Department has provided to her Department's employees working in the Ivory Coast. [78706]

Clare Short: DFID has one employee in Cote d'Ivoire. He is working on secondment at the African Development bank and is, therefore, covered by their security and emergency evacuation procedures. Current bank advice is that non- essential staff and all families be evacuated.

DFID is following the situation closely and we are in daily contact with him. He is also in receipt of the latest Foreign Office travel advice.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which organisations her Department supports that work in the Ivory Coast. [78707]

Clare Short: DFID support to Cote d'Ivoire is channelled primarily through UK contributions to the EC and other multilateral organisations such as the World Bank and UN agencies. Direct assistance to Cote d'Ivoire is limited to financial contributions that we make to the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA) in Bouake and a Small Grants Scheme, administered by the British ambassador in Abidjan. Beneficiaries of the scheme are mainly Ivorian NGO's.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the number of internally displaced people in the Ivory Coast; and what assistance her Department is providing to these people. [78708]

Clare Short: Although DFID has not undertaken its own independent assessment we are in contact with those UN agencies in the field that are monitoring the situation closely. The UK was represented at the UN Emergency Regional Contingency Planning meeting in Accra on 17 and 18 October which was called to discuss the humanitarian position. Their assessment of the likely humanitarian needs is awaited before we consider how the UK will respond.

Uganda

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to promote multiparty democracy in Uganda. [78663]

Clare Short: We are engaged in frequent dialogue with the Government and Civil Society on a range of initiatives to promote the democratic checks and balances, and the rules-based political competition, that are the key to democratic systems worldwide.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the recent massacres in Uganda by the Lord's Resistance Army; and what discussions her Department has had with the government of Uganda concerning these massacres. [78677]

Clare Short: We have over many years raised our concerns over the security and humanitarian situation in northern Uganda with President Museveni, both bilaterally and with other EU Missions. We condemn LRA atrocities and recognise the Ugandan Government's need to respond militarily. But we have also encouraged the Ugandan Government to pursue all possible avenues for dialogue.

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department has taken to encourage the establishment of multi-party democracy in Uganda following the passing of the Political Parties and Organisations Act of 2 July. [78986]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

We have for some time been engaged in a regular dialogue with the Government of Uganda on the future shape of the Ugandan political landscape. Since the Political Parties and Organisations Act came into force on 2 June, we have continued to urge President Museveni and senior Ugandan Ministers to allow political parties to develop and organise, so that they are able to participate fully in the 2006 elections.

We are working on a range of initiatives to promote democracy. These form an important element of our development programme in Uganda.

United Nations Environment Programme Report

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether her Department has received a copy of UNEP's Report, Global Environment Outlook 3; and if she will make a statement. [79081]

Clare Short: My Department has received a copy of UNEP's Global Environment Outlook 3. It is a very useful reference document which we will take into account in our own monitoring of global environmental trends and their impact on developing countries. In this context we were pleased by the successful conclusion of the negotiations of the third replenishment of the Global Environment Facility last August. The UK has increased its share in the GEF, and will provide £118 million over the next four years, including a voluntary contribution of £15 million.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Assets Recovery Agency

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce the first Director of the Assets Recovery Agency, established under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. [79537]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I am pleased to announce the appointment of Jane Earl as Director-designate of the Assets Recovery Agency. I expect that she will take up her appointment as Director in the new year, in time for the Agency to start operations next February.

Asylum Applications (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been paid to the PSNI and RUC, during each of the last three years, in respect of costs incurred in processing asylum applications made in Northern Ireland. [78727]

Beverley Hughes: No payments have been made by the Secretary of State for the Home Department to the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in respect of costs incurred in processing asylum applications made in Northern Ireland during the past three years.

Asylum Costs (Dumfries and Galloway)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been paid to Dumfries and Galloway constabulary in respect of costs incurred in processing asylum applications in each of the last three years. [78499]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration Service has paid Dumfries and Galloway constabulary the following:

	£
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2000	1,950.97
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2001	2,889.50
1 April 2002 to 31 October 2002	32,437.26

The figures for asylum applications are not available. These figures relate to costs related to dealing with immigration offenders.

Correspondence

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters of 17 June and 9 September to the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells regarding Yuriy Urchenko, a constituent. [76664]

Beverley Hughes: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office wrote an interim reply to the hon. Member on 4 October in response to his earlier correspondence. In light of the circumstances of this case, I have asked officials for a full report and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Drugs Trafficking

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to establish a new crime fighting fund to target the illegal drugs trade; and if he will make a statement. [77497]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The financial provision for the law enforcement authorities includes in 2002–03 £376 million for reducing availability of drugs. There are no plans to establish a separate new fun specifically for the purpose.

In addition to that provision, in 2002–03 £70 million has been made available under the Communities Against Drugs scheme for fighting drugs and drugs related crime and for strengthening communities and a significant proportion of the Recovered Assets Fund of £11.7 million will go towards anti-drugs projects.

Recovered Assets Fund

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bids were submitted for funding in the second round of the Recovered Assets Fund; how many of these were recommended for funding; how the selection of bids was made; and if he will make a statement on when the next round of bidding will begin. [79536]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: A total of 330 bids were received in round two (compared to 130 in round one) of which 27 (21 in round one) with a total cost of £11.5 million (£3 million in round one) were recommended for funding.

The bids selected for an award of grant were those which were assessed as best able to meet the objectives of the Fund and as far as possible ensured coverage of a wide geographical area.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I are currently reviewing the future use and operation of the Fund. Future bidding rounds will be dependent on the outcome of the review on which I hope to make an announcement before the end of the year.

Retail Crime

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many incidences of retail crime there were in each of the metropolitan boroughs in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [78138]

(2) how many incidents of *(a)* shoplifting, *(b)* armed robbery and *(c)* assaults in high street shops there were in the past 12 months; [77981]

(3) how many incidents of recorded crime in the last three years have been classed as retail crime, broken down by police force; [77980]

(4) how many cases of violent assault there were against *(a)* rail workers, *(b)* benefits agency staff and *(c)* retail staff in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [77978]

(5) how many instances of violence to retail staff were recorded in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [78134]

(6) what percentage of violent crime was against shop staff in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [78130]

Mr. Denham: Recorded crime statistics do not normally identify the location of offences, or the occupation of victims. The one recorded crime which can be identified as retail crime is theft from a shop, and figures for each police force area for the last three years are given in the table. The figures may have been affected in comparison to the previous year as a result of changes to recording practices. Some police forces implemented the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in advance of its national implementation on 1 April 2002. This had the estimated effect of uplifting total recorded crime figures by 5 per cent. this year.

Figures on the location of firearms robberies indicate that there were 1,323 robberies in shops in the 2000–01 financial year. This includes offences where air weapons, imitation weapons and unidentified firearms were used.

The Home Office, together with the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), will shortly be undertaking a major cross-Government survey of crime that affects retail and manufacturing premises across England and Wales. More than 3,000 premises will be surveyed in each of these sectors. The survey will collect detailed information on the circumstances of crime against business, levels of concern about crime, the overall social and economic impact of crime on businesses and levels of satisfaction with police response and advice on crime.

Recorded crime: 1999–2000 to 2001–02 in England and Wales

	Theft from shops (number of offences)		
Police force area	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Avon and Somerset	7,958	8,741	9,106
Bedfordshire	3,007	3,105	3,663
Cambridgeshire	3,630	3,743	4,024
Cheshire	4,883	4,906	4,599
Cleveland	6,365	6,228	6,916
Cumbria	2,584	2,339	2,798
Derbyshire	4,316	4,537	5,022
Devon and Cornwall	6,346	6,414	5,853
Dorset	3,088	3,011	3,180
Durham	2,944	3,042	3,522
Essex[2]	7,116	6,788	7,149
Gloucestershire	3,471	3,697	3,670
Greater Manchester	16,308	16,196	16,648
Hampshire	10,234	9,674	9,311
Hertfordshire[2]	3,328	4,060	4,424
Humberside	7,188	7,487	8,075
Kent	8,059	8,191	7,943
Lancashire	6,680	7,123	8,050
Leicestershire	4,398	4,184	4,593
Lincolnshire	2,709	2,948	3,504
London City of	619	650	755
Merseyside	8,777	9,584	9,777
Metropolitan Police[2]	48,015	41,713	42,522
Norfolk	3,480	3,801	3,443
Northamptonshire	3,348	3,107	3,451
Northumbria	9,719	10,757	10,566
North Yorkshire	4,053	3,949	4,304
Nottinghamshire	8,533	9,226	10,113
South Yorkshire	7,202	7,525	7,638
Staffordshire	5,981	6,287	6,425
Suffolk	3,118	3,404	3,072
Surrey[2]	2,957	3,602	3,687
Sussex	8,115	7,788	8,157
Thames Valley	9,628	10,796	11,191
Warwickshire	1,976	2,100	2,463
West Mercia	5,732	5,792	6,443
West Midlands	17,891	18,877	20,053
West Yorkshire	11,864	11,317	12,735
Wiltshire	2,623	2,509	2,544
Dyfed-Powys	1,656	1,503	1,427
Gwent	3,213	2,909	3,085

Recorded crime: 1999–2000 to 2001–02 in England and Wales

Police force area	Theft from shops (number of offences) 1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02[1]
North Wales	2,708	2,890	3,681
South Wales	6,674	6,580	6,726
Total	292,494	293,080	306,308

[1] Numbers of recorded crimes will be affected by changes in reporting and recording (NCRS).

[2] There was a boundary change on 1 April 2000 in which some parts of the Metropolitan police area were transferred to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey, so that the police force areas followed county boundaries thereafter. The figures for these forces before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

Yarl's Wood

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the events leading up to the outbreak of fire at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre on 14 February, with particular reference to the reasons why sprinklers had not been fitted at the centre, formed part of the inquiry of Stephen Moore into the incident; and if he will make a statement; [79254]

(2) if he will list witnesses interviewed by Stephen Moore in respect of his inquiry into the Yarl's Wood fire of 14 February. [79255]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Information about witnesses interviewed by Stephen Moore will be made available when his report is published.

Stephen Moore's terms of reference require him to inquire into the events at Yarl's Wood Removal Centre on the night of 14–15 February 2002 and their causes and to make recommendations. His terms of reference also require him to take full account of inquiries being undertaken by the Bedfordshire police and the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, neither of whom has yet concluded their investigations.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strategy is of coalition forces in Afghanistan; if they will take part in the provision of security beyond Kabul to achieve the ISAF effect; and what involvement in humanitarian activities they will have. [79686]

Mr. Hoon: Our objectives for the campaign against international terrorism, and for our forces in Afghanistan, were set out in the paper entitled "Defeating International Terrorism: Campaign Objectives", a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House of Commons on 16 October 2001. We continue to work towards achieving all these aims. As part of this, we are considering with our coalition partners who we might aid the Islamic Transitional Authority of Afghanistan to stabilize further Afghanistan's regions. No decisions on what that might involve have been taken.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will define the International Security Assistance Force effect outside of Kabul; and if he will make a statement on how it will be created. [798685]

Mr. Hoon: The International Security Assistance Force has helped the Afghan authorities to restore and maintain stability within Kabul. We are considering with our coalition partners how we might help the Islamic Transitional Authority of Afghanistan to stabilize further other areas of Afghanistan, but no decisions have yet been taken.

Fire Service Cover

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many green goddess fire engines will be deployed in the Portsmouth South constituency if the fire brigades union takes action; how many servicemen will man each appliance; from what duties they are to be withdrawn from to provide fire service cover; and if he will make a statement. [78968]

Mr. Ingram: Three green goddess fire engines will be based in Portsmouth. The command structure is designed to ensure flexibility when deploying emergency fire cover, and where necessary resources may be deployed from adjacent areas.

Each green goddess has a crew of six per shift, with two shifts, each of 12 hours, providing 24-hour cover. The personnel involved may be withdrawn from a variety of other duties, depending on changing circumstances.

Gunwharf Site

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the Ministry of Defence, in setting a figure for the disposal of the Gunwharf and HMS Vernon site in Portsmouth to Barclays Homes, took into account the Portsmouth City Council plan for the development of the site; and if he will make a statement; [78516]

(2) what assessment has been made of the potential value of the redeveloped Gunwharf and HMS Vernon site in Portsmouth against the disposal value; and if he will make a statement; [78514]

(3) whether the Ministry of Defence has reserved the right to claw back money on the Gunwharf and HMS Vernon site in Portsmouth if the development brief is altered to bring about a substantial increase in the value of the site; and if he will make a statement; [78515]

(4) who advised the Ministry of Defence on the potential value of the Gunwharf and HMS Vernon site in Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement. [78512]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

HMS Caroline

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much he has spent on HMS Caroline in each of the past five years. [78357]

Mr. Ingram: The operating and running costs of HMS Caroline for the last five years are as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*Operating costs (e.g. pay, travel and subsistence)*	*Maintenance costs*
2002–03 (to date)	0.684	0.062
2001–02	1.355	0.080
2000–01	1.230	0.004
1999–2000	1.116	0.034
1998–99	1.013	0.029
Total	5.398	0.209

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the dossier containing the history of HMS Caroline. [78358]

Mr. Ingram: I have placed a brief history of HMS Caroline in the Library of the House.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Department's use of HMS Caroline. [78359]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Caroline served as the Headquarters of the Ulster Division of the Royal Naval Reserve since 1924 and latterly has been designated as the Reserve Training Centre. She is expected to continue in her present role for the foreseeable future.

Inflatable Tanks

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many inflatable tanks have been *(a)* stolen and *(b)* lost in each year since 1991; what the replacement value is of each lost tank; and what steps he has taken to improve protection measures for inflatable tanks. [78653]

Dr. Moonie: There are no records of this type before 1997. Only one tank has been lost since then, on 28 October 2002 due to very high winds, which exceeded tolerances recommended by the manufacturers. These tolerances will be re-emphasised to personnel but protection measures are otherwise considered adequate.

The replacement cost of a single inflatable tank depends upon the model and its accessories and can vary from £8,000 to £14,000.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the relevant military authorities at the British embassy in Washington DC had with the US Congressional Budget Office in preparation of the report of 30 September for the Chairman of the US Senate Committee on the Budget, with specific reference to the Report's estimate of UK force involvement. [78799]

Mr. Hoon: There have been no such discussions with the Congressional Budget Office.

Military Airspace

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of UK airspace is reserved for use by exclusively military aircraft. [78724]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

There is no part of UK airspace reserved for the exclusive use of military aircraft. There are some danger areas, primarily firing ranges, where entry is prohibited to all aircraft, civil and military. The airspace affected amounts to approximately 0.015 per cent. of UK airspace. There are other danger areas where access is permitted under certain conditions, amounting to a further 0.83 per cent. of UK airspace.

Missing Weaponry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many issued *(a)* rifles, *(b)* handguns and *(c)* bullets were unaccounted for at each barracks in each month in Northern Ireland in the last year; what quantity of each was subsequently recovered outside the barracks from which they were taken; and what disciplinary and criminal actions were taken as a result. [78793]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Installations

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to paragraph 27, page 11 of the Government Response to the Defence Select Committee report on Defence and Security in the UK, HC 1230, with which authorities outside his Department he has had discussions in respect of the major programme of activities to reduce the vulnerabilities and strengthen the arrangements for consequence management at nuclear installations. [78654]

Mr. Ingram: The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is responsible for security at nuclear sites. Discussions have taken place with several other Government Departments, including the DTI, Home Office, Cabinet Office, Department for Transport, Office for Civil Nuclear Security, and the Health and Safety Executive, together with local authorities, the police and other emergency services, to review the protection of nuclear installations and arrangements for responding to an incident at any such site.

Operation Amber Fox

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Government's policy is on the EU taking over operation Amber Fox without signing a prior accord with NATO. [79551]

Mr. Ingram: The Government's policy remains, as was agreed by EU nations at the European Council at Seville, that the EU is willing to undertake an operation in Macedonia in succession to operation Amber Fox, at the request of the Macedonian Government, once the EU-NATO permanent arrangements are in place.

Renegade Aircraft

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is in respect of the interception of aircraft assumed to be hijacked entering UK airspace in the London area. [78598]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence has an established and well-practised air defence capability. This mechanism is

ready to detect, deter and as a last resort if necessary destroy any aircraft intending to attack any target within the United Kingdom.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated saving that his Department will make as a result of the early withdrawal of the Sea Harriers in 2006, from the time of their withdrawal up to the introduction of the F35. [77934]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 821–22W, and 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 529W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). Savings in years subsequent to these answers are outside the Ministry of Defence's short-term planning (STP) period, and are, therefore, not definitive. However, they will be commensurate in value with those in the answers previously provided.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

"Education at a Glance"

Mr. Nick Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the conclusion in the OECD Report, Education at a Glance: Indicators 2002, relating to *(a)* the impact on school lessons of noise and disorder and *(b)* boredom among 15 year olds with lessons. [79433]

Mr. Miliband: The OECD report gives a positive overall picture of UK pupils' engagement with school, with above-average scores against a series of measures. Noise and disorder were perceived as problems by 3 percentage points fewer pupils in the UK than the average across other OECD countries, boredom with school by 6 percentage points more.

These figures relate to the year 2000. We believe good teaching and a good curriculum are the best ways to engage and motivate pupils. We have introduced a wide range of strategies to improve teaching and learning, including our widely- acclaimed Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Since September 2001 we have been implementing our new strategy to improve the attainment of 14 year olds (the Key Stage 3 Strategy). There have already been major improvements: OFSTED now rate nearly 70 per cent. of lessons as good compared with 40 per cent. five years ago. We are also making it a top priority to tackle problems of bad behaviour, including a 50 million.

Behaviour Improvement Programme from September this year to provide intensive support for schools facing the most challenging behaviour.

A-Level Students

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students left the A-level system one year into the course in each academic year since that ending in 1997. [79071]

Mr. Miliband: Currently the only source of individual level data that allows the tracking of young people following the A level route is the Youth Cohort Study (YCS). The latest estimates from the YCS show that 9 per cent. of young people studying A levels in year 12 in spring 2000, were no longer studying them in winter 2000–01 (year 13). Comparable data on A level students in the years 1997–99 are not available.

The Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) was introduced in 2002 for maintained schools in England. PLASC will be able to provide information on the number of students in school sixth forms who leave the A level system after a single year of study from 2003 onwards.

Beacon Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the planned development of the beacon school programme over the next five years. [79250]

Mr. Miliband: The new advanced school programme that will be introduced in April 2003 will replace the beacon model in the secondary sector. There are no plans at present to make changes to the programme in the primary, special or nursery sectors, but we are undertaking a review of the programme to ensure that it continues to offer the most effective means of delivering our objectives.

Child Care

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many child care places have been created through the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative; how many of these offer subsidised child care; and at what level of subsidy these places are being offered over what period. [78592]

Maria Eagle: By June 2002, 1,000 Neighbourhood nursery places had been created and an additional 38,000 places are currently under development. Providers can receive funding of up to £5,400 per place over three years to make places affordable to parents in disadvantaged areas, as providers move towards sustainability in the long term.

Parents who receive working families tax credit can also receive help towards child care through the child care tax credit.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of lone parents exclusively *(a)* use registered child care services and *(b)* rely on informal child care in Portsmouth, South; and if he will make a statement. [78966]

Maria Eagle: The latest survey carried out by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf of DfES shows that in England, 29 per cent. of all lone parents had used formal child care in the past year and 73 per cent. of all lone parents had used informal child care in the past year. There is no information on exclusive usage or use of registered child care services. The study "Repeat Study of Parents Demand for Childcare" was published by the DfES in May 2002. This data is unavailable at constituency level.

Children's Centres, Battersea

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) when he will introduce children's centres to the most disadvantaged areas in England; and what plans he has to open children's centres for disadvantaged families in Battersea; [76610]

(2) what investment is being made to enable disadvantaged families in Battersea to benefit from Sure Start style services available to those in the existing Sure Start catchment area in Battersea. [76609]

Maria Eagle: The Government's recent spending review resulted in a significant increase in the combined budget for child care, early years and Sure Start, rising to £1.5 billion in 2005–06. The extra investment will support the integration of good quality child care with early years education, family support and health services through the creation of children's centres in disadvantaged areas, building on the good practice that exists in Sure Start and Early Excellence Centres. By March 2006, an additional 300,000 children and their parents will have access to health, education and other services through children's centres. Announcements about the location of children's centres will be made in due course.

City Academies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many City Academies have *(a)* been set up and *(b)* been committed to be set up; and who the sponsors of each Academy are. [78767]

Mr. Miliband: Three Academies opened in September 2002. These are The Business Academy, Bexley sponsored by David Garrard, Greig City Academy in Haringey sponsored by the Greig Trust and the Church of England and Unity City Academy in Middlesbrough sponsored by Amey plc. 20 Academy partnerships are working to establish Academies. Five of these have funding agreements which are legal contracts to establish an Academy.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether existing schools may apply to become City Academies if suitable sponsors can be found. [78768]

Mr. Miliband: Existing schools may express an interest in becoming Academies. We expect Academies to be set up with the active support of the relevant LEA. For community schools, the LEA would need to publish statutory closure notices in order for an Academy to be established in place of the existing school.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what powers exist for the creation of city academies on a federated basis, by grouping schools under a common governing body. [78771]

Mr. Miliband: Under section 482 of the Education Act 1996 the Secretary of State has powers to enter funding agreements with any person to establish an academy. This power is wide enough to allow funding of a group of academies with a single governing body which could be known as an academy federation. This is not connected with the powers under section 24 of the Education Act 2002, which allow maintained schools to form federations. Section 24 applies only to maintained schools not to academies.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether initial discussions about the setting up of a city academy have begun between his Department, the City of Newcastle upon Tyne LEA and potential sponsors. [78809]

Mr. Miliband: Discussions take place regularly between officials and local education authorities about the scope for academies to play a part in their strategic plans for education. Officials have held such discussions with Newcastle upon Tyne LEA. There has been no formal approach from a partnership, of a sponsor and the local education authority, for an academy in the City of Newcastle area.

Cognitive Ability Tests

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he will list the secondary schools in West Sussex which conduct cognitive ability tests in year 7; [79434]

(2) how many secondary schools in England and Wales conduct cognitive ability tests in year. [79438]

Mr. Miliband: Cognitive ability tests for year 7 are commercial tests produced by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Nelson which schools can purchase if they wish. As such the department has no records of their usage on an individual school, local education authority or national basis.

Departmental Circulars

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the circular documents that were sent by his Department to *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* city technology colleges, *(c)* other secondary schools and *(d)* special schools between *(i)* 1 September and 30 September and (ii) 1 September 2001 and 31 August 2002. [76779]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Departmental Job Vacancies

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many job vacancies there were at *(a)* administrative assistant or equivalent, *(b)* administrative officer or equivalent, *(c)* administrative executive officer, *(d)* higher executive officer, *(e)* senior executive officer, *(f)* grade 7 principal and *(g)* positions above grade 7 level in her Department for jobs located in *(i)* London and (ii) the south east between 1 April 2001 and 31 March; and what is the total employment for each Civil Service grade. [76565]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* Information on vacancies in London and the south east region between 9 June 2001 (when this Department was established) and 31 March 2002, and numbers of DfES staff in London and the south east region at 1 April 2002, is set out in the table:

Responsibility level	*London region vacancies*[1]	*London region total staff*[2]	*SE region vacancies*[1]	*SE region total staff*[2]
Grade 6 and above	10	127	0	3
Grade 7	10	286	3	12
Senior Executive Officer	15	217	2	8
Higher Executive Officer	43	570	2	31
Executive Officer	147	500	2	19
Administrative Officer	64	322	0	4
Administrative Assistant	0	76	0	0
Total non industrial staff	289	2,098	9	77

[1] 9 June 2001 to 31 March 2002.
[2] 1 April 2002.

Education Funding

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will calculate *(a)* the amount spent per pupil on primary and secondary education by Cheshire county council and *(b)* average amount spent per pupil on primary and secondary education by local authorities in England in the last financial year for which figures are available; what assessment he has made of the effect of the comparison of the resultant figures on educational provision in Cheshire; and if he will make a statement. [79275]

Mr. Miliband: The requested information is as follows:

(a) Net current expenditure per pupil in Cheshire

	£
Primary	2,310
Secondary	2,920
Both	2,580

(b) Net current expenditure per pupil in England

	£
Primary	2,440
Secondary	3,060
Both	2,710

All figures in cash terms and rounded to the nearest 10.

The data have been taken from Cheshire education authority's section 52 Outturn statement for the 2000–01 financial year. Variations in spending per pupil between authorities reflect higher area costs and greater incidence of deprivation in some areas. The Government will be announcing later this year the outcome of its review of formula funding for local authorities.

English as an Additional Language

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance he has issued to schools on teaching English as an additional language. [77802]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* The general consensus among practitioners in England is that the teaching of English as an additional language (EAL) is most effective where it is firmly embedded in classroom practice across all national curriculum subject areas. This ensures that pupils have the opportunity to learn English in a meaningful subject specific context. That approach is reflected in the guidance issued by the Department on teaching EAL as part of the national strategies on literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3. Many schools use the resources provided through the Department's £154 million Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) programme to provide additional tailored support for bilingual learners.

Full-time Students

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of *(a)* pupils achieved five GCSEs or more grades A*-C and *(b)* 17 year olds were in full-time education in each region in each year since 1995. [78555]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the tables.

(a) Percentage of 15-year-olds achieving five or more GCSE grades A-C or GNVQ equivalent in maintained schools in England, 1995–2001*

Region	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
North East	36.1	36.3	36.8	37.1	39.4	41.7	42.5
North West	38.9	41.0	41.5	42.2	44.2	45.7	46.1
Yorkshire and the Humber	36.3	37.1	37.9	38.7	40.5	42.1	43.0
East Midlands	39.6	40.7	41.5	43.0	45.3	46.0	47.5
West Midlands	37.7	39.3	40.2	41.3	43.5	44.8	45.8
East of England	44.4	45.0	45.8	48.4	49.9	50.7	51.8
London	36.8	39.0	40.4	42.1	43.6	45.0	46.1
South East	45.4	47.0	47.7	49.2	51.2	52.1	52.8
South West	45.7	46.6	47.1	48.6	50.2	51.3	52.2
England (all schools including independent schools)	43.5	44.5	45.1	46.3	47.9	49.2	50.0

Participation estimates are produced using the academic age of the student (age as at 31 August). Therefore, the estimates for both 16-year-olds (the first post-compulsory year) and 17-years-olds are included. The figures are taken from the latest Statistical Bulletin, "Participation in Education and Training by Young People Aged 16 and 17 in Each Local Area and Region, England".

(b.i) Participation in full-time education by 16-year-olds in each GO region, 1995 to 1999

Region	end 1995	end 1996	end 1997	end 1998	end 1999
North East	62	62	60	61	64
North West	66	65	65	65	67
Yorkshire and the Humber	65	64	65	64	66
East Midlands	67	67	67	67	69
West Midlands	67	67	66	68	69
East of England	75	75	73	74	75
London	75	74	75	74	75
South East	76	75	75	74	75
South West	74	75	73	73	74
England	70	70	70	70	71

Note:
Includes 16-year-olds participating in full-time education in schools, sixth-form colleges and other FE.Source:DfES

(b.ii) Participation in full-time education by 17-year-olds in each GO region, 1995 to 1999

Region	end 1995	end 1996	end 1997	end 1998	end 1999
North East	49	50	49	49	50
North West	54	54	53	53	54
Yorkshire and the Humber	52	53	51	51	52
East Midlands	55	55	55	55	56
West Midlands	56	55	55	55	56
East of England	61	61	60	60	62
London	61	61	61	61	62
South East	62	62	60	62	62
South West	61	61	61	60	61
England	58	57	57	57	58

Note:
Includes 17-year-olds participating in full-time education in schools, sixth-form colleges and other FE.Source:DfES

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will make a statement on the successor scheme to individual learning accounts. [79452]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In June 2003 following the completion of our review of adult learning and as an integral part of our groundbreaking National Skills Strategy and delivery plan.

LEA Directors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance he gives to directors of local education authorities about the use of their powers to call informal meetings of school governing bodies. [78770]

Mr. Miliband: Directors of local education authorities have no powers to call meetings of school governing bodies, but may invite governors, either individually or collectively, to meet them. Paragraphs 24 to 32 of the Code of Practice on Local Education Authority-School Relations (issued in February 2001) give authorities guidance on their role in monitoring and supporting schools causing concern.

Newcastle Local Education Authority

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Standards and Effectiveness Unit were satisfied by 1 October that the City of Newcastle Local Education Authority had a strategy for closing the gap between its GCSE target and the aggregated schools GCSE target; and if he will place the plans for targeting challenge and support for schools in the Library. [78766]

Mr. Miliband: Newcastle local education authority (LEA) has submitted information about their strategy for meeting the LEA's targets for pupil attainment in GCSE/GNVQ. Education advisers from the Department's Standards and Effectiveness Unit are meeting all local education authorities during the course of November and December to take stock of progress towards their 2004 targets. The authority's strategy for meeting its GCSE targets will be one of the issues discussed at the meeting with Newcastle.

School Governors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will place the guidance on *(a)* the conduct of school governor elections and *(b)* handling complaints about such elections in the Library. [78764]

Mr. Miliband: School governor election procedures and associated complaints are determined locally by the appropriate authority, as set out in the Education (School Government) (England) Regulations 1999, Schedule 4, a copy of which is held in the Library.

In relation to a community, community special or voluntary controlled school, the local education authority is the appropriate authority. In relation to a voluntary aided, foundation or foundation special school, the governing body is the appropriate authority.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of school governor vacancies in each category of governor there were in each local education authority in Tyne and Wear in the last three years. [78769]

Mr. Miliband: Information on the number and percentage of governor vacancies in LEAs is not routinely collected by the Department. Individual LEAs may collect their own information.

Schools (Newcastle upon Tyne)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the schools in Newcastle upon Tyne that benefited from a special DfES grant in January 2002 for extra *(a)* classroom assistants and *(b)* headteacher support. [78765]

Mr. Miliband: On 4 January 2002 my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced the Transforming the School Workforce Pathfinder Project—which is working with 32 schools to explore new ways of working to free teachers to teach and raise standards in the classroom. The project includes funding for additional support staff and training for headteachers.

No school from Newcastle upon Tyne is participating in the project, although Forest Hall Primary School in neighbouring North Tyneside is one of the pathfinder schools.

The project runs until July 2003 and the lessons learnt will be shared nationally.

Schools (Stoke-on-Trent)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funds were made available for *(a)* new school building and *(b)* schools refurbishment in Stoke-on-Trent in each year since 1992. [79091]

Mr. Miliband: We do not hold information on the amount of capital investment for new school buildings. The following table provides information on capital allocations for new pupil places, and New Deal for Schools (NDS) funding to address the needs of school buildings in Stoke-on-Trent, since 1997–98, the earliest year for which data is readily available.

Capital allocations Stoke-on-Trent

£000

	All capital	*Of which* *New pupil places*[1]	*New deal for schools (NDS)*[2]
1997–98	1,631	196	900
1998–99	4,629	335	2,799
1999–2000	[3] 97,773	552	1,753
2000–01	9,054	1,806	4,908
2001–02	10,323	1,751	3,418
2002–03	11,433	1,552	6,470

[1] Funding to Stoke-on Trent LEA for Basic Need

[2] NDS windfall tax funding (1997–98 to 2000–01), NDS Condition (2001–02 and 2002–03), Modernisation (2002–03) and Devolved formula capital grant (2000–01 to 2002–03) allocated to LEA and Voluntary Aided schools

[3] Includes £93million PFI contract involving all schools in Stoke-on-Trent, work to be completed in 2005.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Civil Service Secondments

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many individuals have been seconded to senior civil servant positions in her Department, in each case listing *(a)* from which organisation, *(b)* the duration to date and planned duration of conference and *(c)* source of current salary in secondment post. [78980]

Dr. Howells: There are currently no individuals seconded to senior civil servant positions in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many senior civil servants are seconded from her Department, broken down by *(a)* location, *(b)* duration to date and planned duration of secondment and *(c)* source of current salary in secondment post. [78983]

Dr. Howells: There are current two senior civil servants seconded from the Department and their details are in the following table:

Location	*Duration to date months*	*Planned duration months*	*Source of current salary*
London Arts	10	15	London Arts
Broadcasting Standards Commission	16	18	

Cornish Language

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will recognise the Cornish language under the European Charter for Minority and Regional Languages. [77398]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Minister for Local Government and the Regions today (UIN 79871).

European City of Culture

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the decision will be made on the choice of European City of Culture; and if she will make a statement on the method by which it will be chosen. [78360]

Dr. Howells: The UK's nomination of European Capital of Culture 2008 will be announced in Spring 2003.

Twelve UK cities submitted bids and on 30 October my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a shortlist of six to go forward for further consideration. This shortlist was recommended to me by the independent Advisory Panel, chaired by Sir Jeremy Isaacs, which my right hon. Friend appointed earlier this to assess the bids against the criteria laid down by the EU and the Government.

The Advisory Panel will undertake a further and more intensive programme of assessment of the remaining bids over the coming months, to identify an overall recommendation for the UK's nomination.

Interdepartmental Group on Sport

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the membership is of the Interdepartmental Group on Sport; what actions have arisen out of the meetings of the group; and if she will place a copy of the minutes in the Library. [79222]

Dr. Howells: The Interdepartmental Group on Sport brings together the Minister for Sport and Ministers and officials from other Departments and related bodies with an interest in sporting issues. The last meeting included representatives from:

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Department for Education and Skills

Department of Health

Department for Transport

Sport England

New Opportunities Fund

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Policy and Innovation Unit

Home Office

BBC.

As I said in my written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) of 18 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 275W, the group was set up with the intention that those attending could discuss issues and ideas in an informal way, and in the knowledge that any contributions would remain confidential. It would not therefore be appropriate to reveal details of the discussions or to publish the minutes.

Lottery (Scottish ex-servicemen)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many awards have been made by the National Lottery to ex-servicemen's organisations in Scotland, in each of the last five years; and what the total amount awarded was in each of those years. [78739]

Dr. Howells: The Community Fund awarded 17 grants totalling £41,150 to ex-servicemen's organisations in Scotland over the past five years. The following2 table lists the number of grants and amount awarded for each of the five years.

Year	*Number of grants made*	*Amount awarded (£)*
1998	2	3,513
1999	5	6,143
2000	6	14,164
2001	2	9,110
Total	17	41,150

Parliamentary Channel

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on when free to air digital services should include video provision for the Parliamentary Channel. [77466]

Dr. Howells: Since the launch of digital terrestrial television it has been possible to offer only an audio service for BBC Parliament. In its bid to the Independent Television Commission for the former ITV digital multiplex B, and in its subsequent application for a digital programme service licence, the BBC proposed to enhance this service by offering BBC Parliament in video on quarter screen. This arrangement allows the BBC to offer explanatory text simultaneously on screen in addition to the video service and to provide more services on the digital terrestrial platform. With the launch of Freeview this service will now be widely available.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many recipients of severe disablement allowance aged under 20 years on 16 April 2001 have been automatically transferred to incapacity benefit; and how many of these are estimated to have previously claimed *(a)* free prescriptions, *(b)* free dental treatment, *(c)* free eye tests, *(d)* other healthcare benefits and *(e)* other passported benefits. [78330]

Maria Eagle: We reformed Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) in order to provide more support to young people disabled early in life who have never had the opportunity to work. 20,800[1] SDA recipients aged under 20 years on 6 April 2001 were automatically transferred to long-term Incapacity Benefit (IB) in April 2002, making them up to £28.10 per week better off.

Depending on their circumstances, young disabled people receiving IB will still be able to qualify for help with NHS charges (for example, prescriptions, dental treatment, sight tests, money-off vouchers for glasses, wigs, fabric supports and help with the cost of travel to hospital for NHS treatment) on the grounds of low income. We recognise that some will no longer have automatic entitlement to this help but many in this group will already be considerably better off as a result of the changes we have introduced and it would be unfair to treat these people differently to other IB recipients.

[1] This figure is based on a 5 per cent. sample of the benefit computer system and will exclude a small number of clerically held cases. This figure is rounded to the nearest hundred.

Truancy

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment the Government has made of the consequences of withholding child benefit if parents do not co-operate in preventing truancy. [78692]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government are continuing to assess a number of measures related to anti-social behaviour, including actions to deter truancy. Once that assessment has been completed, the Government will come forward with proposals in the usual way.

Mr. Paul Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he plans to publish the proposed Green Paper on pensions. [76092]

Mr. McCartney: The Government will publish a Green Paper on pensions policy later in the year.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* couple families with children and *(b)* one-parent families will be passported to the Sure Start Maternity Grant under the new tax credit scheme. [77270]

Maria Eagle: It is estimated that there will be around 250,000 awards of the Sure Start Maternity Grant in 2003–04 under the new rules. This compares with 201,000 in 2001–02. Around 25,000 of the additional successful claims will be due to the link to the new tax credits.

Information on eligibility by family type is not available.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit fraud investigators were employed *(a)* directly by his Department, and *(b)* by agencies responsible to his Department in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [63682]

Malcolm Wicks: The overall aim of the Department's anti-fraud strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment. The implementation of this strategy means than an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of all staff in the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments.

The information currently available suggests that, throughout the period, around 5,000 staff have been employed by the Department and its agencies in work to investigate suspicions of fraud. However, taking account of changes in data collection measures over time and the integration of investigators more fully with front-line staff, it is clear to me we need to improve the validity and comparability of year-on-year comparisons, and I have asked the Department to undertake further work on this. I have concluded that it is not possible to make valid comparisons between figures year-on-year.

I have therefore asked the Department to undertake a review to improve the consistency of centrally collected information for the future.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 30 October 2002, *Official Report*, c. 874W, on incentive payments for postmasters who report suspected benefit fraud, how many payments of *(a)* £10 and *(b)* £25 were made in each of the last three years. [79556]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is in the table. The number of rewards has reduced as a result of the introduction of the Order Book Control System (OBCS). This is an electronic system that uses barcode scanning to alert a Post Office clerk that the order book presented to them has been reported lost, stolen or recalled. The order book is then impounded by the Post Office clerk. A reward would not normally be payable for order books impounded through the use of the OBCS. National rollout of the OBCS began in March 2000 and more than 99 per cent. of Post Offices were using the system by December 2001.

	Number of £10 rewards	*Number of £25 rewards*
1999–2000	46,314	16
2000–01	27,669	13
2001–02	17,982	59

Benefit Payments

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what steps are being taken to help pensioners in rural areas without banks adjust to the move to benefits being paid to banks and building societies; [76949]

(2) how pensioners in rural areas without bank or building society accounts will be able to access pensions in January 2003. [77091]

Malcolm Wicks: Around 90 per cent of pensioners already have access to a suitable bank account.

The Post Office currently have arrangements with a number of banks to allow customers to access their accounts at Post Office branches. This has already enabled banking to return to those rural areas, which have not had bank branches for some years.

These arrangements will be complemented with the introduction of universal banking services. This will help ensure that benefit and pension customers, who wish to do so, can continue to access their benefits in cash at the Post Office. Universal banking services will consist of two elements: access to basic bank accounts and the Post Office card account. This means that those people who want to open an account should be able to do so, including those in rural areas who might not previously have had access to banking facilities.

Our information campaign will take customers through the changes, including getting their money from their account at the Post Office. Customers will be supplied with information, which clearly sets out their "account options" and enables them to decide which account is right for them. The changes in how benefits are paid will be phased in over a two-year period. Customers do not need to take any action until they receive a letter about the change. Until then they can keep their order book or giro.

Although we will start to contact some pensioners in January to prepare for the change, no-one will need to change their method of payment until April at the earliest.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families will lose entitlement to *(a)* income support and *(b)* income-based jobseeker's allowance as a result of the introduction of child tax credit; and what estimate he has made of the average income of those families affected. [77273]

Malcolm Wicks: All families who move from Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance to Child Tax Credit only will be entitled to the maximum amount of Child Tax Credit up to an annual household income of £13,230. These families can therefore gain considerably from the introduction of the Child Tax Credit.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, c. 634–35W, on benefit payments, how the figures quoted relate to his Department's PSA target on the proportion of parents with care on income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance who receive maintenance for their children; and if he will make a statement. [78075]

Malcolm Wicks: The figures are consistent with one another. The figures given in the answer of 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, c. 635W, on Child Support maintenance, are based on aggregates of:

(a) for 1997, figures, for both total number of parents with care in receipt of the relevant benefit and the number of such parents with care receiving maintenance, for Income Support, income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance;

(b) for 2002, figures, for both total number of parents with care in receipt of the relevant benefit and the number of such parents with care receiving maintenance, for Income Support, income-based Jobseekers Allowance and Working Families Tax Credit.

The Department's Public Services Agreement target refers only to clients who are receipt of Income Support.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if benefit and tax credit recipients who opt to receive payment via a Universal Bank basic account will be able to access their money over the counter at any post office branch. [78553]

Malcolm Wicks: Universal banking services will consist of two elements: access to basic bank accounts at Post Office branches and the Post Office card account. Benefit and tax credit recipients who choose to use universal banking services to access their money will be able to do so at all Post Office branches.

Benefits Agency Staff

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff were employed in the Benefits Agency in the last year for which figures are available; how many staff are expected to be employed in *(a)* Jobcentre Plus, *(b)* the Pension Service and *(c)* each of the other bodies that are replacing the Benefits Agency, once they are fully introduced; and if he will make a statement on how the overall reduction in staff will be managed. [78332]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the numbers of staff in the Benefits Agency at the latest available point, 31 March 2002 is in the following table. Also included are figures for the Employment Service.

Position as at 31 March 2002

	Number
Benefits Agency	66,726
The Employment Service	32,881

Note:
The figures are whole time equivalents

Jobcentre plus and the pension service expect their roll out to be complete by 2005–06 but individual businesses are still developing their staffing plans for the next three years.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions as at 1st October how many people received benefits and pensions, from his Department paid in cash at Post Offices; and how many of these, at date of commencement or other point prior to 1 October, have been offered the opportunity to have their benefits or pension paid directly into a bank account. [77881]

Malcolm Wicks: Approximately 58 per cent. of claimants currently receive their benefit and pensions in cash at the Post Office and 42 per cent are paid direct into their bank or building society account.

As Automated Credit Transfer (ACT) became available for individual benefits at different times, it is not possible to say how many customers were offered the opportunity to have their benefits or pension paid directly into a bank or building society account at the time of making the claim.

Community Care Grants

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will *(a)* review the operation of Community Care Grants; and *(b)* introduce a system of grants for particular life events and needs, available to anyone on a low income. [79216]

Malcolm Wicks: The Social Fund targets the available help on the neediest people in our society.

The Social Fund provides non-repayable Community Care Grants for vulnerable people in a variety of circumstances and we have already introduced improvements to the scheme. For example, the qualifying conditions have been extended to help people setting up home in the community who have been without a settled way of life, and we have increased the annual budget for grants from £97 million in 1997 to £108 million today.

The Fund already provides grants for easily identifiable life events through maternity and funeral payments. The discretionary nature of the Community Care Grants scheme enables it to meet a wide range of needs which a wholly regulated scheme could not.

Contacts (Health and Safety)

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason there was a decrease in the number of contacts with premises by Health and Safety Executive inspectors between 1996–97 and 2000–01. [78447]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of regulatory contacts made by Health and Safety Executive staff for each year between 1996–97 and 2001–02 is given in the table. Overall there has been a 3 per cent. fall in numbers over the period. The reduction is a reflection of the increase in both the quantity and complexity of HSE's reactive work in carrying out investigations. The numbers of investigations has increased from 27,889 in 1996–97 to 37,855 in 2001–02, a rise of 35 per cent.

A balanced programme of inspections and investigations is necessary to secure improvements in workplace health and safety.

The majority of regulatory contacts were made by inspectors; a small proportion, approximately 10,000 in 2001–02, were made by workplace contact officers (WCOs). The WCOs are a small team dedicated to providing advice and information specifically to small and medium sized enterprises.

	Regulatory contacts
1996–97	205,000
1997–98	186,000
1998–99	183,000
1999–2000	185,496
2000–01	192,693
2001–02	195,695

Note:
A regulatory contact includes preventive inspections, investigators, advisory visits, and enforcement visits.

Deferred Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have opted to defer receiving their basic state pension in each year since 1988; and what the average length of time is for which people have chosen to defer their pension. [78334]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested that around three per cent of people who reached state pension age five years ago deferred claiming their basic state pension. On average, these individuals deferred their basic state pension for almost two years.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on the latest March 2002 RP admin data and the Government Actuary's Department mid-year population estimates.

2. Figures are for Great Britain

Employment Action Teams

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what criteria were used to decide the electoral wards of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne that have the service of employment action teams; how those wards scored on those criteria; how *(a)* Wingrove, *(b)* Fenham, *(c)* Blakelaw, *(d)* Moorside and *(e)* Sandyford wards scored on those criteria; and when the criteria will next be reviewed. [78762]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The wards being targeted by the Newcastle upon Tyne Action Team for Jobs were selected because their working age employment rate was 58.5 per cent. or below, at 10 April 2001 when selection took place. All other wards in the City of Newcastle local authority area, including Wingrove, Fenham, Blakelaw, Moorside and Sandyford, had employment rates above this figure at the time of selection. The wards targeted by the Action Team will be reviewed if there is a significant depopulation of the client groups in any of them.

Girocheques

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the annual administrative cost is of sending girocheques to Mrs Kathleen Lonsdale of Westerlands Residential Home Kingsbridge. [78323]

Malcolm Wicks: Information about individuals is confidential and not disclosed under part 2 paragraph 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

However, the current administrative cost of sending on girocheque is £1.47

Injuries

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the record of the Health and Safety Executive in investigating *(a)* reported major injuries to trainees and *(b)* major injuries to people on work experience in the last year for which figures are available. [78446]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Health and Safety Executive does not highlight or target any particular group of workers when selecting incidents for investigation, all workers are treated the same. Enforcement of health and safety is conducted according to the HSC's published Enforcement Policy Statement (EPS). Major injuries to trainees and to people on work experience are likely to satisfy criteria published in the EPS and if they do, would be selected for investigation.

New Deal

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* young people, *(b)* over 50s and *(c)* people with a disability have signed up for the New Deal in Tamworth. [78841]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

Programme	*Cumulative number of participants in the Tamworth constituency*
New Deal for young people (NDYP)	1,150
New Deal 50 plus	130

Notes:
1. Figures are from start of the programme to June 2002 for NDYP, and to August 2002 for New Deal 50 plus.
2. Constituency level information is not available for the New Deal for disabled people.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pension schemes have started the winding-up process in each year since 1997; and how many pension scheme members have been affected in each year as a result, broken down into *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* people who had not retired when the winding-up began. [78333]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Year	Number of schemes started to wind up	Number of members in schemes started to wind up
1997	84	10,271
1998	113	2,309
1999	4,287	101.236
2000	1,903	74,403
2001	2,206	73,038
2002[1]	1,405	40,158

[1] To date

Notes:

1. The information is based on data held by the Pension Schemes Registry (PSR). It includes all types of pension schemes. The figures are for calendar years.
2. The figures are the sum of those live schemes that have reported they are winding up and those schemes accepted by the PSR as winding up. The latter are schemes where the principal employer has gone into liquidation and they were the sole trustees. The figures do not include schemes that may not have reported to the PSR.
3. The PSR system holds information on the most recent change in scheme status, so schemes which were frozen or closed in earlier years may figure in the wind up figures for a later year. Trustees are required to report changes within 12 months so there is likely to be a lag before the data reflects what is happening currently.
4. Before 1997 figures for starting the wind up of schemes were not categorised:they were subsumed within figures for live scheme. The category of schemes in the process of wind up was introduced gradually. The category for schemes notifying that they were winding up was introduced before the category for schemes accepted by the PSR as winding up. Where an actual date was unavailable the current date was used.
5. The information related to schemes, not employers. Some employers operate several schemes.
6. The numbers of members shown include active, deferred and pensioner members. PSR does not hold data broken down by type of member, as this is not required for their purposes.

Post Office (Benefits Access)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what safeguards will be put in place to protect the interests of post office customers who open bank accounts in order to access their benefits, pensions and child benefits. [78584]

Malcolm Wicks: We understand that some customers will be concerned about the forthcoming changes. We have designed the new system with their needs in mind. For example, pensioners have told us that two of the most important things for them were to still be able to collect their money from the post office and also to be able to continue to collect it weekly. Both of these options will be available.

Our information campaign will take customers through the changes, including getting their money from their account at the post office. Customers will be supplied with information which clearly sets out their account options and enables them to decide which account best meets their needs and circumstances. Customers do not need to take any action until they receive a letter about the change.

Social Fund Loans

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what measures are being taken to require social fund staff to ensure that applicants are properly advised on the type of payment most helpful to them; [79177]

(2) if he will implement the recommendation of the social fund commissioner for his Department to put in place a system to manage the quality of advice given to people and the appropriateness of application forms issued by office staff; [79209]

(3) if he will review the guidance and training for social fund staff administering funeral payments; [79210]

(4) if he will ensure that those in contact with the recently bereaved are able to give those people accurate information about the social fund funeral payments. [79212]

Malcolm Wicks: We share the social fund commissioner's view that people should receive good quality advice. Although existing procedures are already designed to provide high standards of service delivery, the Department is currently examining what improvements are possible in this area.

The Department continues to work to improve the training and guidance it gives its staff, including non social fund staff who have contact with customers. Any instance where an office gives wrong information will be investigated and the Independent Review Service has now agreed to provide the Department with details of any such cases that it becomes aware of.

We recognise that bereavement is very distressing and training and guidance for staff reinforces the message of sensitivity when dealing with claims for funeral payments and the need to provide accurate advice and information to customers.

Workplace Inspections

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason the number of inspections of workplaces by the Health and Safety Executive reduced in the last five years. [78448]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The reduction in numbers of preventive inspections from 116,652 in 1996–97 to 75,237 in 2001–02 is a reflection of the increase in both the quantity and complexity of HSE's reactive work in carrying out investigations. The numbers of investigations has increased from 27,889 in 1996–97 to 37,855 in 2001–02, a rise of 35 per cent.

A balanced programme of inspections and investigations is necessary to secure improvements in workplace health and safety.

Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will undertake simulation modelling of the distributional impact of his policies taking account of predicted levels and patterns of non take-up of entitlement to benefits; and if he will make a statement. [74840]

Malcolm Wicks: The distributional impact of policies is assessed by the Department, when it is appropriate and robust to do so, by using simulation modelling based on the Family Resources Survey. The process of making these estimates involves making assumptions regarding the level of take-up of entitlement to income-related benefits. The precise nature of these estimates

and assumptions depends upon the context being modelled; we do not explicitly predict patterns of take-up.

Communications Data

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many officers in his Department and officers authorised by him he estimates will be permitted to seek access to communications data as defined in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000; how many times his Department or such officials sought access to such data from communications providers including Internet service providers under the Data Protection Act 1998 in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [74478]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department is currently making use of powers under the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 which allow authorised officers to require information, including communications data, from the financial, utility and educational sectors to find evidence of fraud. Powers like these will help us continue our crackdown on fraud and make sure that the right benefits go to the right people.

These powers were commenced on 30 April 2002 and 114 officers have so far been authorised by my right hon. Friend. This is in line with our commitment made during passage of the legislation that there would be no more than 300 authorised officers in the department at any one time. In addition, 66 local authority officers have been authorised by their chief executives or chief finance officers.

Information is not held centrally on the number of requests made for data under the Data Protection Act 1998, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Social Fund

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to adopt the recommendation in his Department's Research Report 172, Social Fund use amongst older people, to establish a separate Social Fund for minimum income guarantee claimants as part of the new Pension Service. [74731]

Mr. McCartney: The Government are committed to improving the service currently provided to today's and future pensioners. The Pension Service has replaced the Benefits Agency services for pensioners from 1 April 2002, and is working to introduce an improved service tailored to the needs of pensioners. The Pension Service has been developed as a customer-focused organisation after researching what customers need and expect from the Government in relation to pensions business.

The Pension Service will play a crucial role in both tackling pensioner poverty and encouraging saving by providing a dedicated service for today's pensioners, using modern technology whether they deal with us by telephone or through the internet, by post or face-to-face. It will also improve the service to future pensioners, by providing accurate information to help them make decisions about saving for their retirement. The Pension Service is committed to making access to benefits and services for pensioners, including the Social Fund, as simple and straightforward as possible.

DWP Research Report No. 172 'Social Fund use amongst older people' raised some interesting and important issues. We are giving careful consideration to these issues and how best to address them.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much funding has been given to the Child Support Agency in each year since 1997. [74417]

Malcolm Wicks: The running costs for the Child Support Agency are as follows:

Year to 31 March	*£ million*
1996–97	213.4
1997–98	213.7
1998–99	208.4
1999–2000	227.1
2000—01	209.3
2001—02	226.2
2002—03	211.9

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Activity-led Funding Sub-group for Education

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will publish the report of the Activity-led Funding Sub-group for Education. [79333]

Mr. Miliband: I have been asked to reply.

A paper on the work of the Activity Led Funding sub group was discussed by the Education Funding Strategy Group on 9 September 2002. It is available on the DfES website at www.dfes.gov.uk/efsg/papers.cfm.

Arson

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many incidents of arson there were, broken down by *(a)* fire brigade area and *(b)* local authority in England and Wales in each year since January 1997. [79674]

Mr. Leslie: The table shows the number of malicious fires attended by local authority fire brigades in England and Wales between 1997 and 2000. 2000 is the latest year for which data are available.

Malicious fires by local authority fire brigades 1997–2000

	Number[1]			
Brigade	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[2]
England and Wales	72,932	75,541	91,072	98,005
England	67,682	69,735	84,146	91,171
England (non met counties)	34,292	36,018	43,290	47,735
Avon	1,514	1,657	2,218	2,666
Bedfordshire	824	780	997	1,273
Berkshire	800	767	1,017	1,152
Buckinghamshire	926	984	1,138	1,263
Cambridgeshire	890	953	1,188	1,294
Cheshire	1,129	1,149	1,229	1,332
Cleveland	1,353	1,338	1,843	2,045
Cornwall	347	393	332	426
Cumbria	557	537	663	654
Derbyshire	949	1,002	1,244	1,225
Devon	959	948	992	947

Malicious fires by local authority fire brigades 1997–2000

Brigade	Number[1] 1997	1998	1999	2000[2]
Dorset	643	521	684	799
Durham	1,151	1,237	1,322	1,306
East Sussex	857	874	1,116	1,346
Essex	1,128	1,198	1,657	2,284
Gloucestershire	527	544	553	639
Hampshire	1,205	1,377	1,427	1,365
Hereford and Worcester	610	549	692	706
Hertfordshire	848	784	1,091	1,275
Humberside	1,528	1,798	2,031	1,886
Isle of Wight	87	68	78	84
Kent	1,865	2,148	2,664	3,070
Lancashire	1,968	2,117	2,532	2,534
Leicestershire	1,345	1,469	1,671	1,664
Lincolnshire	551	692	771	742
Norfolk	850	859	858	1,106
North Yorkshire	552	568	655	739
Northamptonshire	929	991	1,195	1,366
Northumberland	528	471	584	570
Nottinghamshire	1,661	1,786	2,463	2,624
Oxfordshire	645	772	787	960
Shropshire	518	579	564	694
Somerset	448	471	579	646
Staffordshire	1,169	1,287	1,450	1,542
Suffolk	386	381	461	600
Surrey	570	609	724	881
Warwickshire	535	506	664	721
West Sussex	582	588	734	794
Wiltshire	358	266	422	515
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
England (met counties)	33,390	33,717	40,856	43,436
Greater Manchester	7,271	7,231	8,467	8,887
Merseyside[3]	3,562	3,691	4,755	5,348
South Yorkshire	2,415	2,660	3,081	3,014
Tyne and Wear	3,152	3,173	3,466	3,326
West Midlands	5,900	5,480	6,762	6,970
West Yorkshire	4,702	5,120	5,802	6,472
Greater London	6,388	6,362	8,523	9,419
Wales	5,250	5,806	6,926	6,834
North Wales	635	758	930	1,058
Mid and West Wales	1,523	1,721	2,123	1,959
South Wales	3,092	3,327	3,873	3,817

[1] Includes "late" call and heat and smoke damage incidents.

[2] Provisional.

[3] Includes estimates for a small number of incidents not recorded during industrial action (Merseyside July 2001).

Audit Commission

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister who is responsible for the selection of Audit Commission representatives. [78748]

Mr. Raynsford: Section 1 of the Audit Commission Act 1998 determines that the Audit Commission shall consist of between 15 and 20 members appointed by the Secretary of State. Appointments are made jointly by my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries of State for Health and Wales, having regard to the Commissioner for Public Appointments' Code of Practice.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will announce the name of the new Chair of the Audit Commission. [79872]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretaries of State for Health and Wales have today appointed for a three year term James Strachan as the new Chair of the Audit Commission.

I have great confidence in his ability to lead the Audit Commission, to which he will bring substantial and diverse experience.

We are driving forward our agenda to reform public services. This appointment comes at a challenging time for the commission, especially with the implementation of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local authorities, its new housing inspection duties and the development of a proportionate and co-ordinated audit and inspection regime.

More than 40 applicants were considered for the post and James Strachan was shortlisted by a panel comprising an independent assessor and senior officials from this Office and the Department of Health.

Cornish Language

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will announce whether the Cornish language will be specified within the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. [76011]

Mr. Raynsford: I am announcing today that, after careful consideration and with the help of the results of an independent academic study on the language commissioned by the Government, we have decided to recognise Cornish as falling under Part II of the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages. The Government will be registering this decision with the Council of Europe.

The purpose of the Charter is to protect and promote the historical regional or minority languages of Europe. It recognises that some of these languages are in danger of eventual extinction and that protection and encouragement of them contributes to Europe's cultural diversity and historical traditions.

This is a positive step in acknowledging the symbolic importance the language has for Cornish identity and heritage.

Cornish will join Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Irish, Scots and Ulster Scots as protected and promoted languages under the Charter, which commits the Government to recognise and respect those languages.

Officials will be initiating discussion with Cornwall county council and Cornish language organisations in Cornwall to ensure the views of Cornish speakers and people wanting to learn Cornish are taken into account in implementing Part II of the Charter.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what decision the Government have reached following its consideration of the case for recognising the Cornish language under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. [79871]

Mr. Raynsford: I am announcing today that, after careful consideration and with the help of the results of an independent academic study on the language commissioned by the Government, we have decided to recognise Cornish as falling under Part II of the

European Charter for Regional or Minority languages. The Government will be registering this decision with the Council of Europe.

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Empty Homes

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to give local authorities greater power to acquire empty homes compulsorily. [78437]

Mr. McNulty: We have no plans to strengthen existing powers of local authorities to acquire empty homes compulsorily. However, we are currently evaluating the recommendation to allow local authorities to compulsorily lease empty homes put forward in the report by the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee on Empty Homes earlier this year. We will make a statement in due course.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans the Government have to introduce compulsory letting of empty residential properties. [79039]

Mr. McNulty: We are currently evaluating the recommendation to allow local authorities to compulsorily lease empty homes put forward in the report by the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee on Empty Homes earlier this year. We will make a statement in due course.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans his Department has to alter the number and scope of executive agencies affiliated to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [79587]

Mr. Leslie: The work of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's executive agencies is subject to regular review. There are no plans at present to alter significantly their number or remit.

Fire Dispute (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Green Goddess fire appliances he plans to station in Buckinghamshire in the event of a firefighters' strike; where they will be stationed; and if he will make a statement. [77985]

Mr. Raynsford: Emergency cover in Buckinghamshire is planned to consist of a number of elements, including six Green Goddesses, three breathing apparatus teams, a rescue team equipped with specialist equipment, and the police. These will be based in Milton Keynes, Aylesbury and Marlow.

The provision of MOD emergency fire cover has been planned in consultation with the chief fire officer to maximise the effectiveness of call-outs and the availability of a range of firefighting capabilities.

The command and operational structure for emergency fire cover has been designed to enable maximum flexibility and use of available resources, whether from within a county or from assets deployed nearby in neighbouring counties. The deployment of firefighters will be based on the assessment of how best to respond to an emergency in the quickest time possible. The deployment will be kept under review.

Fire Safety

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the cost of the *(a)* 'Get Out, Stay Out and Call 999' campaign and *(b)* 'Fire Kills' campaign. [79599]

Mr. Raynsford: Our total budget for fire safety publicity taken forward under the 'Fire Kills' brand is £4.8 million in this fiscal year. Of this, up to £1.8 million has been set aside for the 'Get Out, Stay Out and Call 999' campaign.

Leasehold Valuation Tribunal

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which *(a)* ombudsmen and *(b)* other bodies are able to investigate complaints against the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal. [78467]

Mr. McNulty: Leasehold Valuation Tribunals are independent quasi-judicial bodies which are funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Parties who are dissatisfied with a decision of a tribunal have a right of appeal to the Lands Tribunal. The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration can investigate complaints by someone claiming to have sustained injustice in consequence of maladministration in the way in which a tribunal administers a case but he cannot intervene in the tribunal's decision.

Local Authority Performance

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress with the grading of local authorities under comprehensive performance assessment; and if he will make a statement. [79591]

Mr. Raynsford: The Audit Commission carried out corporate assessments in all English county and unitary authorities this summer, and published the assessment framework on 21 October. They are on schedule to meet the White Paper commitment to announce the final results by the end of this year.

Discussions are now under way between the Audit Commission, Inspectorates, and pathfinder local authorities, to establish the way in which improvement planning can best be undertaken.

The Audit Commission is also currently consulting on the methodology to be employed in assessing district councils' performance as from January 2003.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Flook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what responses relating to the local government finance consultation (1) have been received from *(a)* Taunton Deane and *(b)* Somerset County Council; [79478]

(2) what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services delivered by *(a)* Taunton Deane Borough Council and *(b)* Somerset County Council; [79476]

(3) what response relating to the local government finance consultation has been received from Somerset County Council relating to education funding; and when it was received. [79477]

Mr Raynsford: Both Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane District Council submitted responses to the Formula Grant Review consultation (including the education options in the case of the county) before it closed on the 30 of September.

However, in addition the Government have received around 55,000 letters as the result of various campaigns relating to the Formula Grant Review. None of these campaigns was solely based around Somerset, but since the county is a member of the F40 group of authorities who campaign on education funding a number of those letters do relate to that council. We do not record the details of the senders of campaign letters as a matter of course. For this reason, and since very many of them are multiple copies of the same letter sent by the same people to different Ministers, a more detailed answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

We are currently taking decisions on the new system to replace SSAs. As we do so we are carefully considering the full range of evidence, pressures and points that have been put to us. We will announce the new system for distributing Formula Grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be around the start of December. Once the Government have allocated their grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that we will use grant "floors" to ensure that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many written representations he received in response to the Local Government Finance White Paper; and if he will make a statement. [79595]

Mr. Raynsford: As a White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" was not a consultation document, and a detailed record has not been kept of all the written correspondence received following its publication. However, the number is about 50. The White Paper was preceded by a consultation document, "Modernising Local Government Finance: A Green Paper", to which we received over 1,100 responses.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will give a commitment that no local authority will receive less grant money in real terms under any proposals contained in the Local Government Finance White Paper adopted by the Government; and if he will make a statement. [79606]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will announce its proposals for the new revenue grant distribution system to replace Standard Spending Assessments, including minimum "floors" on grant changes, at the point of the provisional local government finance settlement around the beginning of December. We hope at that point to improve considerably on the interim guarantee already given that no authority will receive less grant next year on a like for like basis.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what research was done by his Department into the impact of dispersal and settlement patterns on the cost of providing rural services in rural areas as part of the local government formula grant review; [79707] s

(2) what assessment he has made of rural deprivation in the local government formula grant review; [79708]

(3) what account he has taken of the cost of providing services in rural areas in the local government formula grant review. [79703]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole, Mr. Cawsey, on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, c. 49W.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many representations he has received relating to the consultation on local government finance as it affects Stockport Metropolitan Borough. [79332]

(2) what proportion of the local government finance consultation responses relating to the Stockport Metropolitan Borough have supported *(a)* each of the four published options for education funding and *(b)* a fifth option. [79331]

Mr. Raynsford: We have two responses received from Stockport MBC and four letters from MPs. However, in addition Government has received around 55,000 letters as the result of various campaigns relating to the Formula Grant Review, including campaigns connected with the F40 group of authorities who campaign on education funding. A number of these letters do relate to Stockport.

We do not record the details of the senders of campaign letters as a matter of course. For this reason, and since very many of them are multiple copies of the same letter sent by the same people to different Ministers, it is not possible to provide a more detailed analysis except at disproportionate cost.

We are currently taking decisions on the new system to replace SSAs. As we do so we are carefully considering the full range of evidence, pressures and points that have been put to us.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects the provisions in the Local Government Finance White Paper will be implemented; and if he will make a statement. [79600]

Mr. Raynsford: An implementation plan for the White Paper was published last April setting out the planned dates for delivering the major proposals in the White Paper. It is updated monthly, and is available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website. There has been substantial progress, including consulting on a draft Local Government Bill that takes forward many of the proposals included in the White Paper.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what impact he estimates changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services in the Ribble Valley. [79709]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce the new system for distributing Formula Grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be early in December. Once the Government has allocated its grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Pike: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Cherry report on probable health effects associated with mobile phone base stations. [78032]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The report by Dr. Neil Cherry on "Together Against Masts" is concerned with an assessment of possible health effects that might arise from exposure to radio frequency (RF) radiation from mobile phone base stations (masts). It was to address such concerns that in 1999 the Government asked the chairman of the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) to set up an Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones (IEGMP). The group was chaired by Sir William Stewart FRS, FRSE and reported to Government in May 2000.

A particular issue for the group was the exposures that might be received by members of the public from local base stations and the potential for effects on health. This is the issue addressed by Dr. Cherry. The conclusions in the IEGMP report were that:

> The balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of guidelines

Measurements undertaken by the NRPB and the Radiocommunications Agency have confirmed that public exposures are very much lower than the international guidelines. Network operators have undertaken to ensure that all base stations will be designed and sited, so that members of the public will not be exposed in excess of the recommended basic restriction.

The group were aware, however, that if people are unduly concerned about potential exposures then that in itself may affect their well-being. A number of recommendations of the group were, therefore, designed to provide more information to people about local base stations.

The group also made recommendations for further research work. These proposals for research were principally directed as providing more information on exposures from mobile phones but also have relevance to exposures from base stations. It additionally recommended that there should be a further review of relevant research in three years time, or earlier if circumstances demand it.

The Government welcome the report as an authoritative review of the scientific information available. It also accepted the recommendations and these have been taken forward by Government and by other bodies. A research programme funded by Government and industry on a 50:50 basis is taking forward the research recommendations.

In coming to its conclusions, the IEGMP undertook an extensive review of the relevant scientific literature and heard evidence from 28 witnesses during the course of its work. It also organised five open meetings to hear the views of the public. Many of the references cited by Dr. Cherry were reviewed by the expert group. Professor G. J. Hyland, then of the University of Warwick, whose work is referred to by Dr. Cherry gave evidence to the group. The IEGMP also drew upon evidence provided by the NRPB and other organisations on exposures to RF from base stations.

The further review of research findings is being carried out by NRPB's independent advisory group on non-ionising radiation. It is expected that this will be completed in 2003.

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many equivalent full-time employees are employed in *(a)* non-departmental public bodies and *(b)* executive agencies affiliated to his Department. [79666]

Mr. Leslie: The latest available figures for the numbers of full-time equivalent employees employed in *(a)* non-departmental public bodies are:

	Number
Audit Commission	2,436
English Partnerships	376
Housing Action Trusts	
Castle Vale	99
Liverpool	79.80
Stonebridge	67
Tower Hamlets	14
Housing Corporation	605.86
Standards Board for England	75
Rent Assessment Panels	70.95
Valuation Tribunals—	155

The latest available figures for the numbers of full-time equivalent employees employed in *(b)* executive agencies are:

	Number
Fire Service College	250[1]
The Planning Inspectorate	710[2]
The Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	50
The Rent Service	790

[1] Including 46 lecturers seconded from Fire Brigades.
[2] Excluding 126 fee paid inspectors which are not calculated as full-time equivalents.

In addition, Ordnance Survey, a separate non-ministerial Government Department and executive agency, which is the responsibility of ODPM Ministers, has 1,840 full-time equivalent employees.

Park Home Reform

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his plan for Park Home Reform. [79034]

Mr. McNulty: We are considering what changes in the law would be required to implement such recommendations in the Park Homes Working Party report as the Government have endorsed. The prospects for new legislation on Park Homes will naturally reflect the pressures on the Government's legislative programme. However, as, recommended by the Park Homes Working Party, a study of the economics of park homes was carried out and published on 29 October. We are also working with bodies representing home owners and park owners on such matters as creating a model constitution for residents' associations and model procedures for sales and assignments of homes.

Regional Assemblies

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 389–90W, if stakeholders within the regional assembly can be individuals. [79348]

Mr. Raynsford: The White Paper is not prescriptive as far as the definition of stakeholders is concerned. Organisations or individuals with an interest in the work of an elected assembly can potentially be considered as stakeholders.

Revenue Grant Distribution

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many representations he has received from residents of *(a)* Cheshire and *(b)* Macclesfield constituency registering their response to his Department's review of revenue grant distribution; when he expects to announce his decision following his Department's consultation; and if he will make a statement. [79273]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government have received around 55,000 letters from the public relating to the Formula Grant Review, the great majority being as the result of various campaigns that have been organised. One of these campaigns was based in Cheshire, and we estimate that around 200 responses were received as part of that. Cheshire is also one of the constituent authorities of the F40 education funding campaign, and a proportion of the approximately 53,000 responses received as part of that originated from within the country.

We do not record the details of the senders of campaign letters as a matter of course. For this reason, and since very many from the F40 campaign are multiple copies of the same letter sent by the same people to different Ministers, it is not possible to provide a more precise answer, or one for the constituency of Macclesfield, except at disproportionate cost.

We are currently taking decisions on the new system to replace SSAs. As we do so we are carefully considering the full range of evidence, pressures and points that have been put to us. We will announce our proposals for the new system to Parliament at the time of the next provisional local government finance settlement, which we expect to be around the beginning of December.

Rough Sleepers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 21 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 61W, when a street count for under 16s living rough last took place in *(a)* London and *(b)* West Sussex; what criteria is used to count under 16s in the street count; and when the Social Exclusion Unit will publish its report into young runaways. [78194]

Mrs. Roche: Street counts were last carried out in London and West Sussex during March 2002. These found no one sleeping rough aged under 16. Anyone who is bedded down in the open air, people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation, including those under 16, is included in the figures.

The Social Exclusion Unit hopes to publish its report on young runaways shortly.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions his Department has had with the Home Office regarding police involvement in dealing with the issue of under 16s living rough. [78195]

Mrs. Roche: The police and the Home Office have been key members of the Young Runaways Advisory Group, advising on issues for runaways when they are away from home. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is also a member of the Missing Persons Cross-Departmental Group led by the Home Office. In addition, the police work with outreach teams across the country. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not had discussions with the Home Office regarding police involvement with under 16s living rough.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many 16 to 18-year-olds are living rough in *(a)* London and *(b)* West Sussex following the last street count. [78196]

Mrs. Roche: The street count carried out in London in March 2002 identified one person aged 18 sleeping rough. A full analysis of count information showing breakdown by age is not currently held centrally for West Sussex. When informed of results of street counts we would expect to be notified if a person under 16 is found sleeping rough.

Social Housing

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to *(a)* increase new social housing provision by 2005–06 and *(b)* set interim targets to reduce the number of non-decent social sector homes by 2006; and if he will make a statement. [78893]

Mr. McNulty: In his statement to the House about sustainable communities on 18 July, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister promised to return to the House with a comprehensive long-term programme of action to tackle a number of housing and planning issues. That statement, which will be made around the turn of the year, will set out how the additional funding announced in the spending review will be used, and what it will buy over the three years up to 2005–06. It will cover the points raised by the hon. Member.

Starter Home Initiative

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what were the *(a)* total allocated funds and *(b)* allocated funds used for administering costs for each scheme manager of *(i)* round one and *(ii)* round two of the Starter Home Initiative. [78631]

Mr. McNulty: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 484–88W, and the reply which was given to the hon. Member on 30 October 2002.

The total amount allocated for scheme managers' administration costs was £11.5 million for round one of the Starter Home Initiative and £0.8 million for round two.

Vehicle Fires

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many non-accidental vehicle fires there were, broken down by *(a)* fire brigade area and *(b)* local authority in England and Wales, in each year since January 1997. [79683]

Mr. Leslie: The table shows the number of malicious road vehicle fires attended by local authority fire brigades in England and Wales between 1997 and 2000. 2000 is the latest year for which data are available.

Malicious road vehicle fires, by local authority fire brigade 1997–2000

	Number[1]			
Brigade	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[2]
England and Wales	38,218	43,383	56,836	63,780
England	35,163	40,090	51,888	58,941
England (non met counties)	17,519	20,505	26,564	30,671
Avon	887	1,158	1,669	2,049
Bedfordshire	512	533	727	962
Berkshire	509	561	720	862
Buckinghamshire	562	653	808	893
Cambridgeshire	504	537	827	881
Cheshire	432	567	619	667
Cleveland	571	755	1,125	1,208
Cornwall	178	162	169	239
Cumbria	301	344	372	430
Derbyshire	507	567	85	802
Devon	442	462	499	556
Dorset	285	317	401	476
Durham	508	657	732	749
East Sussex	455	520	716	885
Essex	649	724	961	1,565
Gloucestershire	265	256	290	354
Hampshire	526	710	802	838
Hereford & Worcester	299	311	415	458
Hertfordshire	431	466	677	845
Humberside	722	902	1,186	1,092
Isle of Wight	22	10	21	19
Kent	1,086	1,397	1,864	2,368
Lancashire	821	918	1,229	1,170
Leicestershire	752	819	1,075	1,057
Lincolnshire	263	364	373	423
Norfolk	411	436	489	696
North Yorkshire	255	252	384	452
Northamptonshire	550	632	763	942
Northumberland	271	236	327	309
Nottinghamshire	818	1,062	1,562	1,776
Oxfordshire	373	478	544	686
Shropshire	309	309	315	409
Somerset	226	248	374	411
Staffordshire	653	809	955	971
Suffolk	164	148	222	326
Surrey	329	381	508	629
Warwickshire	343	397	461	506
West Sussex	238	291	389	435
Wiltshire	89	159	192	274
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
England (met counties)	17,644	19,585	25,324	28,269
Greater Manchester	4,042	4,130	5,166	5,723
Merseyside[3]	1,569	1,838	2,568	3,124
South Yorkshire	1,562	1,901	2,254	2,130
Tyne and Wear	1,581	1,738	2,068	1,953
West Midlands	3,044	3,110	4,154	4,424
West Yorkshire	2,875	3,491	4,169	4,818
Greater London	2,972	3,378	4,945	6,098
Wales	3,056	3,793	4,948	4,840
North Wales	274	314	488	632
Mid and West Wales	991	1,221	1,631	1,520
South Wales	1,791	2,258	2,829	2,688

[1] Includes "late" call and heat and smoke damage incidents.
[2] Provisional[3] Includes estimates for a small number of incidents not recorded during industrial action (Merseyside July 2001).

Flooding

Joan Ryan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to amend the planning legislation, regulations and guidance for *(a)* the building of new homes on land located within flood plains and *(b)* for existing buildings in areas prone to flooding; and if he will make a statement. [74609]

Mr. McNulty: There are no plans to amend planning legislation in respect of building new homes in flood plains or for existing buildings in areas prone to flooding.

The Government issued comprehensive strengthened guidance on the operation of the planning system in regard to flood risk in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 25 "Development and flood risk" in July 2001. We said then that we would review this guidance in the light of experience of its implementation and effectiveness and the developing scientific knowledge on climate change three years after publication. In the meantime we are continuing to monitor how it is being applied through the Environment Agency's high-level target 12. The report for 2001–02 was recently published on the DEFRA website. It indicates that PPG 25 is already beginning to have an effect and that less than 0.5 per cent. of all new homes were subject to sustained objections on flood risk grounds. In the remaining cases, local planning authorities had considered the matter carefully before allowing development to proceed.

To complement the new, stronger planning guidance, DTLR published "Preparing for floods" in February 2002. This contains interim guidance for improving the flood resistance of domestic and small business properties. It provides practical advice for existing property owners whose properties are at risk of flooding and for all those involved with construction of new properties or renovation of existing buildings in areas of flood risk. The Environment Agency, together with the Construction Industry Research and Information Association, has also produced guidance on temporary measures to protect against flooding (such as flood boards) and on what to do after a flood.

In addition, we are working with the Environment Agency, local government, the water industry and others to produce an agreed guidance framework for the development of sustainable drainage systems. Such systems, which are encouraged in PPG 25, aim to control water as near its source as possible and thus reduce the downstream risk of flooding. They will help to reduce the potential impact on existing properties of flooding due to uncontrolled run-off from newly developed areas.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

EU Green Paper

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what representations she has received from ADRs concerning the new EU Green Paper. [78868]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Green Paper on Alternative Dispute Resolution in Civil and Commercial Law was issued by the European Commission, and responses to the consultation were to be made directly to the Commission. We did, however, draw the attention of interested parties to the Green Paper and asked them to copy their responses to the Lord Chancellor's Department, in order that the UK Government response would be fully informed. Copies of responses were received from: Advice Services Alliance; Alliance for Electronic Business; Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution; Commercial Bar Association; Finance and Leasing Association; National Association of Citizen Advice Bureaux; UK College of Family Mediators; Morley and Scott (chartered accountants); Arthur Marriot and Henry Brown (solicitors with experience of ADR in both an international and domestic context). There may be other responses that have not been copied to us.

Fines (Prompt Payment)

Dr. Francis: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, whether it is her policy for a discount to be offered to defendants for prompt payment of fines. [78683]

Yvette Cooper: At present there is no provision enabling a discount to be offered to offenders who pay their fines promptly.

The White Paper, "Justice for All", published in July, announced new proposals aimed at improving enforcement rates. These include offering a discount for prompt payment of fines. The measures would be piloted and evaluated prior to any decision to roll them out nationally.

TREASURY

Accesses to Communications Data

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 17 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 918W, on the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, how many of the accesses to communications data in relation to Customs and Excise led to *(a)* the recovery of VAT and *(b)* the prosecution of individuals; how many of the accesses to communications data in relation to the Inland Revenue led to *(i)* the recovery of tax and (ii) the prosecution of individuals; how much tax was recovered; and how many individuals were prosecuted. [78436]

Dawn Primarolo: The information systems of neither department record the total tax recovered nor the number of prosecutions stemming directly from access to communications data. Consequently, this information could be obtained only at wholly disproportionate cost.

Ageism

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the processes the Government follows to appraise companies on its tender list for their record with respect to the code of practice on age discrimination. [79377]

Mr. Boateng: Individual Government Departments are responsible for taking decisions on the goods and services they acquire, taking account of the EC procurement rules and the Government's procurement policy of seeking value for money for the benefit of the taxpayer.

In terms of the criteria for the rejection and selection of candidates for a tender list, these are defined in the EC public procurement directives, which are implemented in the UK by the following regulations:

(a) SI 1191 No. 2680—The Public Works Contracts Regulations 1991: Regulations 14 to 19;

(b) SI 1993 No. 3228—The Public Services Contracts Regulations 1993: Regulations 14 to 20; and

(c) SI 1995 No. 201—The Public Supply Contracts Regulations 1995: Regulations 14 to 20

Barnett Formula

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of New Opportunity Fund expenditure in Scotland on the operation of the Barnett Formula. [78736]

Mr. Boateng: The New Opportunities Fund is a Lottery Fund. Lottery funds are distributed by the relevant lottery distributor. They are not part of the Scottish Executive's Departmental Expenditure Limit and do not therefore fall within the Barnett formula arrangements for determining changes to the devolved administrations' budgets.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answers of 5 February and 19 September, *Official Report*, columns 845W and 207W, when he plans to publish the September 2000 to September 2001 Inland Revenue benchmarking exercise into the level of fraud in working families tax credit. [78891]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 19 September 2002, *Official Report*, column 207W, to the hon. Member.

Borrowing

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on his borrowing plans for the remainder of the financial year; [78990]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the state of the public finances; and if he will make a statement. [78991]

Mr. Boateng: Consistent with the Code for Fiscal Stability, an interim update of projections for the public finances will be published in the forthcoming pre-Budget report.

Cigarette Smuggling

David Burnside: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the number and value of cigarettes smuggled into Northern Ireland and the loss of revenue to the Exchequer due to such smuggling in the last 12 months. [79192]

John Healey: Customs do not keep separate records of the number and value of cigarettes smuggled into Northern Ireland. The vast majority of smuggled cigarettes enter the UK through the major ports and are then distributed across the UK.

The Government will be publishing figures, for the UK, of the number of cigarettes seized and the latest estimate of the revenue loss from the illicit tobacco market as part of the pre-Budget report.

The most recently published information for the scale of revenue loss in the illicit tobacco market is for the year 2000–01, and is contained in "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" published in November 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Departmental Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer [pursuant to his answer of 24 October 2002], *Official Report*, column 441W, if he will list schemes and initiatives sponsored by his Department which are not the subject of national roll-out. [78293]

Dawn Primarolo: I have nothing to add to my earlier answer.

Domestic Fuel (VAT)

Alan Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what barriers exist to prevent domestic fuel being zero-rated for VAT; and if he will make a statement. [79497]

John Healey: Under long-standing formal agreements with our European partners, no member state is permitted to introduce new zero rates or restore a zero rate once it has been withdrawn.

Fuel Smuggling

David Burnside: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the *(a)* volume and *(b)* value of petrol and diesel smuggled into Northern Ireland and *(c)* the loss of revenue to the Exchequer due to such smuggling in the last 12 months. [79191]

John Healey: The Government will be publishing their latest estimates of the revenue loss in the Northern Ireland road fuel sector as part of the pre-Budget report.

The most recently published estimates for the scale of revenue loss in the Northern Ireland road fuel sector, which are for the calendar year 2000 and include both revenue loss from fraud (smuggling, misuse and laundering) and from legitimate cross-border shopping, are contained in "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" published in November 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 218W, if he will list *(a)* the series of activities to enable the Inland Revenue to manage its records better and *(b)* the activities to enable the Inland Revenue to manage its records better which existed before the introduction of CR74; when the CR74 series of activities commenced; and if he will make a statement. [78576]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue reviews its record management regularly to seek improvements. The latest exercise, internally called CR74, ran for around six months from the start of this financial year. It involved a check of national insurance numbers (NINOs) held on the existing records. Checking NINOs is part of the Inland Revenue's day-to-day work, but this was a systematic updating exercise conducted over a relatively short period of time. The Department has kept the updated records separate. It has also introduced better processes to trace and match the existing and updated records.

IT Contract

Mr. Caton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the new contractor will be required to provide *(a)* an employer contributed final salary pension scheme for all employees and *(b)* a pay and conditions system that guarantees equal pay for equal value, including for sub-contracted staff, when the contract for providing IT services to the Inland Revenue is awarded. [79453]

Dawn Primarolo: The invitation to tender for the procurement will apply Government policy on pensions as set out in "Staff Transfers from Central Government: A Fair Deal for Staff Pensions". An incoming supplier will be required to adhere to this policy and apply it to all staff transferring to them. The incoming supplier will also be obliged to comply with all UK laws and regulations relating to employment and non-discrimination.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether employees will be entitled to join a trade union recognised to negotiate on pay, conditions, pensions, career development and related issues when the contract for providing IT services to the Inland Revenue is awarded. [79458]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue regards human resource and personnel issues as an important element in the evaluation of any bid for the IT contract. The Department will therefore ask bidders to provide information on their intended human resources policies, including their approach to trade union recognition, as part of their response to the invitation to tender. The right to trade union recognition—along with any collective agreements—is one of the transferable rights of any employee affected by a TUPE transfer. Therefore any incoming supplier will be required to provide trade union recognition, where this exists already, for employees working on the Inland Revenue's current IT contracts. The Inland Revenue will oblige the incoming supplier to comply with all UK laws and regulations relating to employment and non-discrimination. The Inland Revenue is actively engaging both PCs and USRO in the procurement process.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the new contractor will be subject to periodic independent reviews of performance when the contract for providing IT services to the Inland Revenue is awarded. [79459]

Dawn Primarolo: The draft contract requires the supplier to engage in a rolling programme of benchmarking to be undertaken by an independent agency to monitor performance. In addition, the Department has also specified rights for both National Audit Office and the Department's own internal audit office to be involved in reviews of systems and processes, in their respective roles, over the lifetime of the contract.

Landfill Tax

Dr. Whitehead: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what the yield of the landfill levy was in the last 12 months; and what proportion of it was contributed by local authority levy payments. [78655]

John Healey: For the 12 months to end of September 2002, total Landfill Tax receipts were 505m. All revenue receipts are published monthly in Table 2.1 D of the Office for National Statistics publication "Financial Statistics". The proportion of Landfill Tax receipts attributable to local authority activity is not available, as revenue information on Landfill Tax is obtained via the return declarations made by registered bodies, and Landfill Tax is therefore declared by local authorities under their own registration and by private contractors who collect waste on behalf of local authorities and declare the landfill tax on their own returns.

London Stock Exchange

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to visit the London Stock Exchange. [79108]

Ruth Kelly: There are no immediate plans for the Chancellor to visit the London Stock Exchange. However, Ministers have met senior representatives of the London Stock Exchange in the past six months, and also have regular contact with management from companies listed on the exchange and companies who are members of the exchange.

National Insurance

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 218W, on national insurance, how many letters have been sent to people that have been using incorrect national insurance numbers in the last *(a)* month, *(b)* six months and *(c)* year. [78575]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not keep detailed records of the contents of a substantial number of letters received and sent every day. Most letters sent by our staff cover a range of issues relating to a customer's financial affairs that may include or relate to the use of the national insurance number (NINO). It would incur disproportionate cost to identify letters sent to people who have been using incorrect NINOs.

Saving

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to increase the level of saving in the UK economy. [79095]

Ruth Kelly: The Government recognise the importance of saving and asset ownership in providing individuals with security, comfort in retirement and long-term independence and opportunity. The Government is implementing a saving strategy focusing on three central strands:

creating the right environment for saving by maintaining macroeconomic stability and establishing a well regulated and efficient market in financial services;

creating the right incentives for saving by ensuring that the tax and benefit system does not unfairly penalise savers and by assisting those on lower incomes; and

ensuring that people have the information and financial literacy they need to make the right saving choices.

Statements on the progress of specific policies will be provided in the pre-Budget report.

Stability and Growth Pact

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions he has had with his European counterparts regarding the future of the Stability and Growth Pact; [79136]

(2) what discussions he has had with his colleagues in the European Council of Finance Ministers regarding a review of the terms of the Stability and Growth Pact. [79103]

Ruth Kelly: The Government support a prudent interpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact, which takes into account the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment. We continue to discuss this with our EU colleagues.

Tax Processing

Matthew Taylor: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place the data on *(a)* outputs and *(b)* resources underlying the outcome target for tax processing work as reported in the Inland Revenue Annual Report (Cm5428) in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [78413]

Dawn Primarolo: Productivity on tax processing work in 2001–02 showed an increase of almost 1 per cent. over the previous year. The Inland Revenue's Public Service Agreement for 2001–04 set out targets for improvements in productivity, over three years. The aim is to achieve, by 31 March 2004, an increase of 7.7 per cent. (cumulative) equivalent to 2.5 per cent. year on year. Initiatives are in place to achieve the step changes in productivity necessary to meet this target. The productivity index for tax processing is calculated by comparing a basket of outputs representative of this work with the staff time spent carrying out the tasks. These include Self Assessment and Corporation Tax returns captured, PAYE end of year returns reconciled and closed and repayment claims processed.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Fuel Poverty

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will give an undertaking to eradicate fuel poverty by 2010; and if she will make a statement. [77416]

Mr. Morley: The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, published in November 2001, sets out the approach of the Government and the Devolved Administrations to tackling fuel poverty. It explains that the goal of the Government and the Devolved Administrations is to seek an end to the problem of fuel poverty. In particular they will seek an end to the blight of fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010. We are currently consulting on a clarification to the strategy which will set a target for the eradication of fuel poverty in respect of households other than those in the vulnerable categories. The consultation period ends 29 November 2002. We intend to produce an annual report on our progress in implementing the Strategy in the new year.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase public awareness of energy efficient products and services. [77442]

Mr. Morley: My Department remains committed to expanding the highly visible mandatory EU energy labelling for appliances and equipment. This also requires the provision of similar consumer information in catalogues and in other product literature which all serve to increase consumer awareness.

We are also encouraging EU-wide voluntary agreements with manufacturers and service providers which aim to set targets for improved products and services and raise awareness of energy efficiency issues. One aspect of this is to provide reliable, public domain consumer environmental information about their products and services via point-of-sale information and searchable product information data- bases.

The Energy Saving Trust, which is funded by my Department, encourages the sustainable use of energy in the domestic and small business sectors. Work includes an Energy Efficiency campaign to encourage domestic consumers to take up energy efficiency measures. The Trust also runs a product endorsement scheme which signposts customers to products that are the most—or among the most—energy efficient available and aims to increase sales of these products. Products that are accredited under the scheme carry the Energy Efficiency Recommended logo. Decisions about future plans for raising public awareness of energy efficient products and services will be covered in the Energy White Paper, which the Government aims to publish around the turn of the year.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to allow local authorities to set targets for the improvement of energy efficiency in stock transferred to registered social landlords. [77460]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

Local Authorities are already able to set such targets. The Housing Transfer Guidance 2002 Programme, issued by DTLR in September 2001, expects a local authority to ensure that each transfer proposal agreed with a new landlord delivers the energy efficiency targets that are implicit in the Government's decent homes target (to ensure all social housing is brought up to a decent standard by 2010).

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with HM Treasury on the ways in which economic policies and instruments might be used to assist home energy efficiency. [77470]

Mr. Morley: Defra and HM Treasury have carried out a joint consultation on economic instruments to improve household energy efficiency. The results of thisconsultation will be jointly considered, in the context of the wider process of preparing the Energy White Paper, which the Government aims to publish around the turn of the year. Any decisions on possible tax changes would be a matter for the Chancellor to consider as part of the Budget process.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to develop energy efficiency indicators, targets and monitoring mechanisms for each sector of the economy. [77471]

Mr. Morley: The Government will respond to the PIU's recommendations in the Energy White Paper, which the Government aims to publish around the turn of the year.

Agricultural Subsidies

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the United Kingdom spent on assistance to agriculture in the last year for which figures are available; and what assistance was provided from EU sources. [79260]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Public expenditure on agriculture in the United Kingdom in the 2000–01 financial year was £3,042million. The UK received £2,720million from the EU under the Common Agricultural Policy in its 2000–01 budget year. These figures include payments of market support, which may not have gone directly to farmers, as traders are also eligible.

Biofuels Directive

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department plans to take on the EU Biofuels Directive; what discussions she has had with those in the agriculture industry on the potential for production and use of non-food crops; and if she will make a statement. [77939]

Mr. Meacher: Negotiations on the EU biofuels targets Directive are still taking place and are being led by the Department for Transport. It is anticipated that the outcome of the discussions will be a requirement for member states to set indicative targets for the use of biofuels as a transport fuel by July 2005. The Government recognise that liquid biofuels and non-food crops in general have potential for UK agriculture and regular discussions are held with farmers and industry representatives on a wide range of non-food crops issues. The Government-Industry Forum on Non-Food Uses of Crops, which includes representatives from the farming sector, was set up in 2001 to review market opportunities for non-food crops and make recommendations to Government on policy affecting their use. The Forum is looking at several non-food crop applications, including biodiesel and bioethanol.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate her Department has made of the spread of bovine TB to farming areas restocked with cattle following the lifting of movement restrictions imposed after the foot and mouth outbreak last year. [77390]

Mr. Morley: All new incidents of bovine TB in cattle are recorded and subject to epidemiological investigation. The information obtained is added to the epidemiological database of information relating to the incidence of bovine TB in Great Britain.

Defra has commissioned extensive research into the transmission of bovine TB in restocked herds, this will cover a period of two years following restocking.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets her Department set for the testing of cattle for bovine TB during this year's summer months. [77392]

Mr. Morley: TB testing is an important element in the control of bovine TB. Reducing the number of overdue TB tests to an acceptable level following the testing backlog built up during the foot and mouth disease outbreak is one of the Department's priorities and an additional £3 million has been made available to the State Veterinary Service in England and Wales this year to help with this.

The uptake of testing is traditionally slower in summer months as cattle are out to pasture. While no specific targets were set for the testing of cattle for bovine TB over the summer Defra issued a press notice encouraging farmers to organise their tests. At the end of September the number of outstanding herd tests stood at just over 14,900 tests (down from 27,000 at the end of last year).

On 9 October Defra announced a package of measures for the control of bovine TB in cattle in England. Part of the package is the imposition of movement restrictions on herds with overdue tests. Movement restrictions are being introduced in stages to reflect the risk of disease attached to overdue tests and taking account of the resources available to test herds.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many new cases have been reported of TB on farms in Gloucestershire in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [79315]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* In the 12-month period 1 October 2001 to 30 September 2002, 216 new TB incidents were reported on cattle premises in Gloucestershire.

The number of TB incidents reported depends on the number of tests carried out and the nature of the testing regime as well as the underlying prevalence of the disease. Testing resources over the 12 month period October 2001 to September 2002 were concentrated on herds with overdue tests following the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. These would have had a longer period in which to contract the disease. Those currently tested also contain a higher than usual proportion of high risk herds than were being tested prior to the FMD outbreak. As a consequence it is very difficult to assess whether there has been a greater increase in bovine TB than anticipated and it will remain difficult to interpret the numbers of incidents reported until the backlog of tests following the FMD outbreak has been cleared.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the interim assessment she has made of the cause of TB in cattle. [79316]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Bovine TB in cattle is caused by the organism *Mycobacterium bovis*. Defra is funding a wide-ranging programme of research into how bovine TB is spread. It includes research into the nature of the disease in cattle; what factors in the environment increase the risk to cattle; the spread of the disease between cattle, and between cattle and wildlife; and the role of the badger and other wildlife in disease transmission. Research is still on-going. It is too early to draw conclusions at this stage.

Bushmeat

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost is per unit of X-ray equipment capable of the detection of bushmeat in aircraft passenger luggage. [75928]

Mr. Morley: The cost of X-ray machines varies with size and specification. Trained operators and associated personnel are also required, all of which add to the costs. Defra is investigating the potential for using X-ray machines to detect illegal imports of meat, meat products and bushmeat in passenger baggage and commercial freight entering the UK. Until these investigations are complete, we cannot calculate costings.

CAP Reform

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with EU entrant countries on CAP reform. [77305]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 October 2002]*: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my noble Friend Lord Whitty met Ministers from Poland, Estonia, Romania and Turkey in July. CAP reform was among the topics discussed. In addition my noble Friend Lord Whitty visited Hungary, the Czech Republic and Estonia in September and CAP reform featured in his discussions with agriculture Ministers there.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her European counterparts over reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. [77941]

Mr. Morley: Apart from regular contacts in the Agricultural Council my colleagues and I meet frequently to discuss this on a bilateral basis. Most recently I met with my German opposite number on 24 October and plan to meet my Spanish counterpart on 7 November.

Civil Service Secondments

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many individuals have been seconded to senior civil servant positions in her Department, in each case listing *(a)* from which organisation, *(b)* the duration to date and planned duration of secondment and *(c)* the source of current salary in secondment post. [78981]

Alun Michael: There has been one individual seconded to a senior civil servant position in this Department since its creation in June 2001. The details are as follows:

From	*Duration*	*Source of current salary*
Warwick University	March 2002 to March 2007	Warwick University

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many senior civil servants are seconded from her Department, in each case listing *(a)* location, *(b)* duration to date and planned duration of secondment and *(c)* source of current salary in secondment post. [78982]

Alun Michael: There are three senior civil servants seconded from this Department. Details are given in the table.

Organisation and Location	*Duration*	*Source of current salary*
The Carbon Trust—(London	January 2001 to April 2007	Defra
Oslo and Paris Commission (OSPAR)—London	February 2001 to February 2003	OSPAR
United Nations Environmental Protection (UNEP)—Nairobi, Kenya	August 2000 to July 2003	UNEP

Collection Bins

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce amnesty collection bins for food products at UK air and seaports. [77540]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 October 2002]*: We are currently consulting the Home Office, the Department for Transport, HM Customs and Excise, and the relevant ports and airports, on the issues surrounding the provision of amnesty bins or equivalent measures to encourage the surrender of unintended illegal personal imports.

Common Agricultural Policy

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs under the Common Agricultural Policy dairy regime, what overall annual level of payments has been made to dairy processing and exporting companies in the UK over the last 10 years, broken down by type of *(a)* subsidy, *(b)* company and *(c)* product. [76614]

Mr. Morley: The table details expenditure on a calendar year for each of the dairy processing schemes and the dairy product based export refund schemes administered by the Rural Payments Agency (and previously the Intervention Board) from 1993 to 2002 inclusive. These schemes are prescribed by European Community regulation, but participation in them by the

industry is entirely discretionary. Beneficiaries under these schemes include:

Creameries and traders (suppliers to the industry).

Manufacturers of pastries, cakes, biscuits, ice-cream, casein/caseinates and concentrated butter for direct consumption.

Suppliers of butter to non-profit making organisations.

Manufacturers of certain animal feedstuffs.

Manufacturers, suppliers (wholesale and retail) and victuallers who export dairy products to non-member countries.

The figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.

Rural payments agency annual payments made to dairy processing and exporting companies in the UK over the last 10 years

Scheme	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*Total*
Butter for direct consumption	160	2,932	1,594	1,191	1,748	1,819	1,046	1,109	1,026	740	13,365
butter for manufacture	0	0	0	0	0	23,100	36,271	31,700	29,520	20,851	141,442
Butter for non-profit making organisations	5,613	4,471	4,349	2,303	2,893	2,405	1,586	1,008	1,115	746	26,489
Butter for manufacture	51,808	48,897	57,234	36,307	49,009	20,539	86	0	0	0	263,880
Intervention Butter purchases	0	0	0	6,987	36,612	18,586	16,677	15,467	4,646	18,986	117,961
Control of casein in cheese	0	0	0	-1	18	0	-13	0	0	0	4
Liquid skimmed milk for stockfeed	677	365	341	87	167	146	53	15	0	0	1,851
PSB-Private storage of butter	989	1,595	668	353	441	590	626	1,027	837	571	7,697
Casein and Caseinates	78	0	30	0	0	0	3,777	7,420	420	0	11,725
Skimmed milk powder for animal feed	6,789	5,613	5,603	2,865	3,530	2,431	2,584	2,043	941	853	33,252
Intervention Purchases	313	10,355	0	40,003	34,736	40,424	25,429	994	0	18,755	171,009
Skimmed milk Powder											
Skimmed milk for Russia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	859	0	0	859
Skimmed milk powder-Export Refund	8,946	7,403	8,741	3,812	15,440	6,322	8,528	10,161	462	1,871	71,686
Whole Milk powder-Export Refunds	39,776	51,935	48,789	49,315	70,343	57,177	50,595	48,352	725	4,322	421,329
Condensed Milk-Export Refunds	47	20	18	14	11	9	7	7	3,551	476	4,160
Butter and butter Oil-Export Refunds	9,366	11,247	7,873	1,544	5,800	1,114	1,428	1,531	1,429	465	41,797
Cheese-Export Refunds	33,549	26,565	15,104	15,286	3,430	4,336	5,558	3,986	22,631	2	130,447
Other Dairy products-Export Refunds	20,244	20,055	18,932	12,478	7,778	5,281	2,805	1,134	6	28,228	116,941
Total	178,355	191,453	169,276	172,544	231,956	184,279	157,043	126,813	67,309	96,866	1,575,894

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when she will reply to the correspondence from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed dated 24 January referring to correspondence dated 23 October 2001 which was referred to her by the Paymaster General relating to constituents who let holiday cottages in an area subject to foot and mouth restrictions. [52099]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General responded to the right hon. Member on 12 June. His original correspondence was sent to this Department inadvertently and was consequently transferred to HM Treasury.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will send a full response to the letter dated 18 April from the hon. Member for Leominster on behalf of Mr. A. T. F. Brodie, a constituent. [77025]

Mr. Morley: A response was sent to the hon. Member on 1 November.

Egg Packers

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has, in line with the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food's recommendations, to undertake a formal review of the Supermarkets' Code of Practice in order to increase the certainty and security for egg producers by altering the Code in relation to contractual arrangements between egg packers and supermarkets. [77776]

Mr. Morley: We are in discussion with the Office of Fair Trading and the Department of Trade and Industry, which is responsible for policy on competition issues, over the Policy Commission's recommendations with regard to the code. Our response to these recommendations will be published in the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy later this year.

Energy Efficiency

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to expand existing domestic energy efficiency programmes; [77443]

(2) when she plans to develop a new strategy for home energy efficiency. [77444]

Mr. Morley: Decisions about current and future programmes for tackling domestic energy efficiency, including any future strategy, will be covered in the Energy White Paper, which the Government aims to publish around the turn of the year.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what improvement in energy efficiency in domestic properties by 2010 she expects to result from local authorities' activities under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; what the predictions were in the UK Climate Change Strategy; and if she will make a statement on how the discrepancies will be addressed. [77439]

Mr. Morley: Circular 2/96 indicated that the Secretary of State expected energy conservation authorities' reports to show a strategy for making at least substantial progress towards a 30 per cent. improvement over a 10-year period. Improvement in the first six years is just over 8 per cent.. It is therefore clear that authorities are not going to make the improvements they originally hoped for. Decisions about the future role of local authorities in local energy efficiency are expected to be covered in the Energy White Paper, which the Government aims to publish around the turn of the year.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the *(a)* number, *(b)* location, *(c)* socio-economic

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characteristics, and *(d)* amount received of those households who have qualified for grants under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme *(i)* since it began operating and (ii) allocated for future periods; [77588]

(2) if she will list the *(a)* number, *(b)* location, *(c)* socio-economic characteristics and *(d)* amount applied for of those households who have applied unsuccessfully for grants under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme since it began operating. [77587]

Mr. Morley: The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme is now marketed as The Warm Front Team, and is the Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector in England. The Scheme was launched in June 2000 and by June 2002 over 400,000 households had received assistance and some £200 million had been spent on installing measures. Warm Front provides insulation and heating measures depending upon the needs of the householder and the property type.

The Scheme Managers provide, on an annual basis, information on the number, location and measures installed under the scheme to local authorities. However, socio-economic information is not colleted. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 275W. Updated information is not available and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Clients not eligible for assistance are not recorded. The numbers are likely to be significant and additional costs would be incurred in keying, and maintaining the two Scheme Managers' databases. As an indication of scale, it is estimated that the two call centres handle in the region of 20,000 calls per week in the winter.

The level of funding available for future years of Warm Front will be decided by the Department in the new year as part of the spending review process.

EU Agriculture Spending

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the procedures adopted by the EU if spending on agriculture in any year appears to be likely to exceed the budgetary estimates. [79257]

Mr. Morley: Heading 1 of the annual EC budget sets out expenditure appropriations for spending on the Common Agricultural Policy by budget line. In cases where expenditure for any line looked likely to exceed the appropriation the European Commission would be able to propose an in year transfer from another line within the heading. In the event of unavoidable, exceptional or unforeseen circumstances, the Commission may propose during the year that the budget be amended and submit a preliminary draft amending budget to the Council and the European Parliament. The Commission, Council and European Parliament would remain bound by the expenditure ceilings set down in the Financial Perspective and inter-institutional agreement on budget discipline.

Fallen Stock

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for the disposal of fallen stock after April 2003; and if she will make available a free service of collection and disposal. [79264]

Mr. Morley: Since April 2002, the Government have been holding discussions with livestock and disposal industry stakeholders with the aim of developing a national fallen stock disposal scheme. At a stakeholder meeting on 18 September the collection and disposal industries submitted a joint proposal for a National Fallen Stock collection and disposal scheme. I intend to meet the industry to discuss their proposal. However, it is for the livestock industry, like other industries, to pay for the disposal of its waste.

Farm Employment

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many persons were employed in the farming industry in each of the past 10 years. [79262]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The answer is as follows:

Total labour force in England

	Thousand
1991	445.0
1992	440.2
1993	437.7
1994	430.9
1995	425.2
1996	420.5
1997	417.0
1998	415.0
1999	397.7
2000	373.9
2001	[1]386.8
2002 (provisional)	386.9

[1] The figures for June 2000 and 2001 are not directly comparable. Between 2000 and 2001 a review of temporary holdings took place, which resulted in the addition of holdings not previously included in the census. If these holdings had not been included in June 2001 the total agricultural labour force would have been recorded as 368.3 (thousands).

Notes:

1. Includes estimates for minor holdings.
2. The total labour force is that employed on registered agricultural holdings.
3. The estimates include employees, farmers, partners, directors and their spouses where the spouse works on the holding.
4. Estimates have been made for non-respondents
5. Figures exclude school children but include trainees employed under an official youth training scheme and paid at Agricultural Wages Board rates or above.
6. In 1998, fundamental changes were introduced to the labour questions on the June Agricultural and Horticultural Census in England. It appears that this change in questions may have led to the recording of additional Labour who were not previously included in the returns. We therefore advise caution when comparing the 1998 results with previous years.

Source:

June Agricultural and Horticultural Census

Farming

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what

encouragement the Government are giving to young people to enter farming; and if she will make a statement. [79242]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* One of the key tasks of Defra is to work with all concerned to develop an economically viable, sustainable, diverse and dynamic farming industry. Providing such an economic framework is the best way of encouraging young people to enter farming. My Department is preparing a response to the recommendations of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food; including its recommendations on entry into farming, and on ensuring new entrants have the right skills. An announcement will be made in due course.

Farming (Capping Levels)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with EU Farm Ministers about capping; what steps she is taking to increase the capping levels for UK farms; and if she will make a statement. [79233]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* We have made our position on capping of direct payments clear whenever this has been discussed at the Agriculture Council or at meetings of officials preparing for the council. We oppose capping of these payments in principle and have not taken any steps to modify the proposal by altering the levels at which capping would apply.

Fisheries

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions her Department has had with *(a)* the European Commission, *(b)* the French Government and *(c)* other EU member states regarding the possible impact of *(i)* pair trawling for bass and (ii) industrial fishing methods upon the wider marine environment and the conservation of cetaceans. [79021]

Mr. Morley: Commission proposals for the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy include a commitment to bring forward proposals by the end of 2002 to reduce cetacean bycatch and to commission from ICES a study of the impact of industrial fishing on the wider marine environment. These are plans which the UK supports and will be looking to drive forward when they come up for substantive discussion in the CFP review process. I have written to Commissioner Fischler and to the French Minister pressing the need for action in relation to cetacean bycatch, particularly in the bass fishery: the researchers contracted by Defra to trial measures to reduce cetacean bycatch have been meeting contacts from France and elsewhere to secure wider commitment to this work.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the total allowable catch of cod available for each of the fisheries management areas for which cod quotas apply has been caught by each of the member states entitled to catch cod around the seas of the United Kingdom *(a)* in each of the last five years for which figures are available and *(b)* so far this catching year. [79024]

Mr. Morley: The table containing the required data has been placed in the Library.

Foot and Mouth

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of compensation payments made in the foot and mouth epidemic are estimated to have been in excess of the market value of the animals destroyed; and what steps the Department is taking to recover excessive payments. [79407]

Mr. Morley: Compensation values for animals destroyed in the foot and mouth epidemic were set in accordance with the Animal Health Act 1981 and reflected the market value i.e. the amount the animal destroyed would have fetched at
market had it been sold at the time it was slaughtered.

Valuations were made by a large number of independent professional valuers operating as MAFF/ Defra's appointed experts working on site, with the animals in view and with the herd history, recent herd transactions and historical knowledge of market price obtainable for the breed and category of the animal being valued in the relevant geographical area.

150 valuations, about 1 per cent. of the number of valuations, were challenged where it was thought the valuations were excessive. The Department sought further evidence from the valuers on these valuations. This evidence was then scrutinised by the Department's professional adviser before payment was made.

As a result of the scrutiny four valuations were considered excessive. Two were reduced and two others are currently in the Department's Arbitration Unit still to be resolved.

Fuel Poverty

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group about progress towards meeting the objectives of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy; and how she intends to respond. [77445]

Mr. Morley: The Fuel Poverty Advisory Group was set up, following the publication of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy—November 2001, to advise Government on the delivery of its fuel poverty targets. The Group is to report annually to Ministers. The first annual report of the Group is expected around the turn of the year. The representations made will be given due consideration.

Home Energy Conservation

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department received from local authorities *(a)* prior to and *(b)* following the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill; and if she will list those authorities. [77403]

Mr. Morley: The performance figures for local authorities' progress with their HECA strategies compiled by DEFRA have been collected from the data provided by local authorities in their energy conservation reports. This data have not been subjected to a detailed statistical analysis. Nevertheless, in compiling figures and data relating to the overall position in England, instances where data provided by authorities was clearly incorrect or inappropriate have been pursued with the authority concerned, clarified and, where appropriate, and with the agreement of the authority concerned, amended.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions were held between her Department and the hon. Member for Brighton and Kempton *(a)* prior to and *(b)* following the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill. [77407]

Mr. Morley: There were discussions between Ministers and the hon. Member for Brighton and Kempton at each stage of the Home Energy Conservation Bill. There have been no discussions following the withdrawal of this Bill.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she intends to adopt as Government policy the target of a 20 per cent. improvement in home energy efficiency by 2010; and if she will make a statement. [77433]

Mr. Morley: The Government will respond to the PIU's recommendations in the Energy White Paper, which the Government aims to publish around the turn of the year.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she intends to offer further financial support to local authorities to assist them in meeting their targets under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; [77456]

(2) if she will make it her policy to fund fully the costs to local authorities of meeting the targets that they have set in their strategies under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; and if she will make a statement on any other policies and incentives which she intends to use to ensure that these targets are met. [77438]

Mr. Morley: The Government have no plans to provide local authorities with the full funding necessary to meet the targets they have set in their HECA strategies. Non-local authority programmes, such as the Government's Warm Front programme and gas and electricity suppliers' Energy Efficiency Commitment, will deliver the majority of the improvements needed to meet these non-statutory targets. The full cost will therefore not fall to local authorities. Any new obligations the Government placed on authorities would, of course, be funded in full.

Housing

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment procedures are in place to determine whether *(a)* shelters, *(b)* bedsits and *(c)* houses in multiple occupation are fit for habitation. [77422]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

A residential shelter will normally be regarded as a house in multiple occupation for the purpose of the Housing Act 1985 and a traditional bedsit will normally also form part of a house in multiple occupation.

Section 604 (1) of the Housing Act 1985 provides that a dwelling (including a house in multiple occupation) is fit for human habitation unless the local housing authority is of the opinion it is not reasonably suitable for occupation because it fails to meet one or more basic standards. These include that the dwelling is to be structurally stable, free from damp and serious disrepair; have adequate provisions for lighting, heating, ventilation and supply of water; have adequate facilities for the preparation and cooking of food; have suitably located toilet, bathing and washing facilities and an effective drainage system.

In addition section 352 (1A) of the Housing Act 1985 sets out further standards which may be applied in relation to a house in multiple occupation by a local housing authority in its determination of whether the property is fit for the number of persons or households occupying it. These standards include that the property has satisfactory facilities for preparing and cooking food; an adequate number of toilet, bathing and washing facilities and an adequate means of escape from fire and other fire precautions.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what resources have been provided in the last 12 months to ensure that enforcement officers' searches of suspected illegal meat imports will take place. [76010]

Mr. Morley: Searches for illegal imports of meat and meat products form part of the normal duties of port health authorities and local authorities. However, in this financial year, an extra £1.5 million has been allocated for checks to be conducted by additional enforcement officers at ports and airports. Defra is matching funding with the Food Standards Agency to provide additional training for enforcement officers on import rules.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what additional measures have been taken to comply with the new rules and regulations which come into effect from 1 January 2003 regarding illegal import of meat and dairy products; and how much additional funding has been allocated to policing the rules and regulations. [79263]

Mr. Morley: The Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports) (England) Regulations 2002 will be amended to bring it into line with the new Commission decision on imports of meat and dairy products for personal consumption. Revised penalty posters are being produced, as well as updated information for travellers and airlines. Guidance to enforcement officers is being revised. Stakeholders are being informed of the changes.

The Government have allocated an extra £1.5 million in this financial year for additional enforcement officers at certain ports and airports.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many prosecutions there have been for the illegal importing of meat in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [79282]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Figures on prosecutions for the illegal importation of meat are not collected centrally. Responsibility for prosecutions lies with local authorities. We are however aware of one successful prosecution this year, which was brought by Crawley borough council in July. The London Port health authority issued six cautions in October.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase the checks made at ports of entry to the United Kingdom of illegally imported meat; and if she will make a statement. [79319]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Plans to increase checks at ports of entry to the United Kingdom are at an advanced stage. Additional checks started at two seaports at the beginning of October, are on target to start at a third seaport on 4 November. Two further teams will start work at airports on 11 and 12 November respectively.

Import Controls

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many representations she has had urging her to tighten import controls on meat from *(a)* the Meat and Livestock Commission, *(b)* the NFU and *(c)* others. [75143]

Mr. Morley: Frequent high-level meetings, at both ministerial and official levels, have been held with representatives of the NFU and, to a lesser extent, the MLC. Both the MLC and NFU sit on the Illegal Imports Risk Assessment Steering Group. Ben Gill, NFU President, addressed the Illegal Imports Stakeholders' Forum held on 21 March 2002. Also present were the International Meat Trade Association, British Meat Manufacturers' Association, National Beef Association, National Pig Association, National Sheep Association, World Wildlife Fund, UK Association of Frozen Food Producers, Local and Port Health Authorities, British Airports Authority and British Ports Association. Meetings of foot and mouth disease stakeholders groups have been held regularly this year, addressing the issue of illegal imports. We have also received a substantial number of written representations from individuals, and organisations including the WI, Townswomen, Councils, legal firms and agricultural equipment suppliers.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy towards Commission allowances for intervention stocks to be directed towards deprived persons; what categories of recipients exist; and in how many instances the Government have applied for such relief in the UK. [77253]

Mr. Morley: The EC Surplus Food Scheme was introduced in 1988 to reduce intervention stocks and benefit the most deprived persons in the Community (those receiving income support, family credit, disability working allowance, together with those living in welfare hostels, and the homeless and destitute). The UK withdrew from the scheme from 1996 because of the reduction of EC food mountains.

Meat Statistics

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much meat was *(a)* produced in the UK, *(b)* consumed in the UK and *(c)* imported into the UK in the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [79240]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The following table shows the volume of UK home-fed production, UK imports and UK total new supply of meat for the years 1992–2001.

Supplies indicate the amount of meat available for immediate consumption in the UK.

000 tonnes

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[1]
Beef and veal										
Home-fed production	973	888	947	1,002	710	698	699	679	706	645
Imports	206	209	190	212	169	217	152	183	197	253
Total new supply[2]	1,014	885	844	880	799	901	842	853	892	889
Mutton and lamb										
Home-fed production	401	402	395	403	383	351	385	403	389	265
Imports	127	129	120	147	156	152	141	137	134	116
Total new supply[2]	376	347	354	356	376	362	380	386	390	334
Pork										
Home-fed production	810	813	836	791	801	888	931	831	725	610
Imports	91	113	116	168	200	177	190	235	274	254
Total new supply[2]	768	796	798	771	806	817	829	831	790	807
Bacon and ham										
Home-fed production	189	216	233	245	241	239	236	233	209	197
Imports	234	238	224	228	261	240	231	230	268	268
Total new supply[2]	418	450	451	467	497	471	459	457	468	460
Poultrymeat										
Home-fed production	1,217	1,277	1,356	1,415	1,476	1,520	1,545	1,525	1,513	1,564

000 tonnes

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[1]
Imports	183	170	214	251	281	277	316	349	355	343
Total new supply[2]	1,316	1,361	1,458	1,503	1,584	1,584	1,664	1,687	1,694	1,730
Total										
Home-fed production	3,591	3,596	3,767	3,856	3,611	3,695	3,798	3,670	3,541	3,281
Imports	840	859	864	1,006	1,067	1,062	1,031	1,135	1,228	1,234
Total new supply[2]	3,891	3,839	3,905	3,977	4,062	4,135	4,175	4,214	4,235	4,221

[1] 2001 data are provisional.
[2] Total new supply = home-fed production plus imports minus exports, and is the total amount of produce available for consumption.
Source:
DEFRA Statistics website, www.defra.gov.uk/esg

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about *(a)* the areas included and *(b)* the exclusion of river water in the nitrate vulnerable zone scheme; how it will be policed; and how many extra forms will be generated by it. [79243]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The Nitrates Directive requires the identification of polluted waters using the following criteria: *(a)* surface and groundwaters which contain or could contain, if preventative action is not taken, nitrate concentrations greater than 50 mg/l; *(b)* surface waters which are or could become, if preventative action is not taken, eutrophic.

The Nitrates Directive then requires all known land draining into these waters, from which agriculture could contribute to the pollution, to be designated as Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs). Around 55 per cent. of England has been designated as NVZs on the basis that it drains into these waters.

The Environment Agency (EA) are adopting a risk based approach to the enforcement of action programme measures which farmers located in the NVZs will be required to apply from 19 December 2002. The EA will prioritise farms that have the greatest potential for nitrate loss rather than visiting all farms, and will aim to work with farmers to help achieve compliance over a period of time.

There is no requirement for farmers to fill in any new forms to comply with this legislation. Farmers in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones are expected to keep records of their application of manures and fertilisers. However, there is complete flexibility for farmers to do this in whatever way is most convenient for them, including using existing field records.

Non-food Uses of Crops

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress the Government Industry Forum on Non-Food Uses of Crops has made; and if she will make a statement. [79869]

Mr. Meacher: Over the past year the forum has met six times and has been working on a number of studies of areas of potential development in the non-food crops sector. Examples include biopackaging, the use of natural fibres in composite materials, biosolvents and biolubricants. The forum has also considered generic issues which affect this sector. The forum published its first annual report in August 2002 which details its work and sets out its first series of recommendations to Government. I am placing copies of the report in the Libraries of both Houses.

Pigswill

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government has made to the EU about EU member states still using pigswill. [76314]

Mr. Morley: In negotiations on the EU Animal By-Products Regulation, the UK opposed any delay in introducing an EU-wide ban on swill feeding. However, to secure adoption of the regulation, the UK accepted that a transition period might be appropriate for two member states, Austria and Germany, providing suitable controls were in place during that period.

Public Paths

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government intend to bring forward statutory instruments to implement the part of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 that will reclassify roads used as public paths as restricted byways. [79379]

Alun Michael: Our aim is to consult on the content of the regulations needed to implement the restricted byway provisions no later than March 2003.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many roads used as public paths have been reclassified as bridleways following review of their usage in accordance with section 54 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; [79381]

(2) how many roads used as public paths have been reclassified as byways open to all traffic following review of their usage in accordance with section 54 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; [79383]

(3) how many roads used as public paths have been reclassified as footpaths following review of their usage in accordance with section 54 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. [79382]

Alun Michael: The reclassification of RUPPS is the responsibility of Highway Authorities. The information sought is not available centrally.

River Parrett Catchment Project

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she has received a proposal from the Parrett catchment project to fund a sluice on the River Parrett; [78751]

(2) if she has received a proposal from the Parrett catchment project for a sluice on the Parrett. [78747]

Mr. Morley: A tidal sluice is one of the component options being considered by the Environment Agency (EA) as part of its Parrett Catchment Water Management Action Plan. The EA advises that the technical, environmental and economic evaluation of options is on-going and Defra has not yet received any formal proposal for the proposed sluice on the River Parrett.

School Milk Scheme

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department has spent on the School Milk Scheme in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 to date. [78385]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* For the year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 the expenditure on School Milk Subsidy was £8,010,877.57.

For year 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 the expenditure increased to £8,632,079.31.

For year 1 April 2002 to 29 October 2002 the expenditure was £5,849,398.72.

Water Courses

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Environment Agency regarding the cleaning of water courses; and if she will make a statement. [79237]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The Department has frequent discussions with the Environment Agency on reducing pollution from water courses.

Water Industry

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been carried out to establish that a customer threshold of 50 megalitres per annum in non-domestic water supply will enable a new entrant to make a viable financial return. [77013]

Mr. Morley: The Government published a consultation paper on July 31; "Extending Opportunities for Competition in the Water Industry in England and Wales". This proposed competition only in the non-household sector, with an eligibility threshold of a minimum of 50 megalitres (Ml) a year. The consultation period closed on 1 October and we are now considering responses.

In preparing the proposals, assessment was made of the broad cost breakdown between the main elements of the supply chain, the likely scope for making savings on these, and the ranges of charges paid by users. Experience shows that the market will determine financial viability in a competitive environment.

These issues will be taken into consideration as we balance the need to create opportunities for competition while continuing to secure the Government's wider objectives for the water industry, which include protecting public health, the environment, social and economic goals, and safeguarding services for household customers.

Wood for Good Campaign

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what contribution the Wood for Good campaign is making towards the goal of ensuring that all timber into the UK is from legal and sustainable sources. [77581]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The impact of the Wood for Good campaign has recently been evaluated by an independent consultancy. The study showed that the campaign is meeting its objectives. These objectives do not include ensuring that all imported timber is from legal and sustainable sources. However, the campaign has improved understanding of the environmental safeguards in wood supplied from the member countries. The demand for construction timber from the member countries has increased and is attributed in part to the campaign.

Woodland Grants Scheme

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was made available through the Woodland Grants Scheme in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03; and how many applicants and how much was received by each recipient through the scheme in each of those years. [78393]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The information is given in the table.

	Total paid	*Number of schemes for which payments were made*	*Number of payments made*
2000–01	16,513,784	7,639	8,898
2001–02	15,796,737	7,063	8,065
2002–03 (to date)	9,602,179	4,816	5,333

Some applicants have more than one scheme and some have received more than one payment in a year. A list of individual payments would involve thousands of entries, and has not therefore been produced.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

China

12. **Dr. Ladyman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the possible effects if Article 23 of the Basic Law in Hong Kong is enacted; and what representations he is making to the Government of the People's Republic of China. [77173]

Mr. Rammell: The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government have published outline proposals—but not yet draft legislation—on implementing Article 23. We have made clear to them that any legislation should be consistent with the principles of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong and the two UN human rights covenants.

International Terrorism

13. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the state of the international coalition against terrorism. [77174]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The coalition against terrorism that we helped to build in the aftermath of 11 September remains resolute in its objective to eradicate terrorism as a force in international affairs. It has a long list of achievements to its credit: apart from Afghanistan, terrorists have been disrupted and arrested around the world, and there have been significant steps forward in international co-operation. But we have no illusions about how much more needs to be done.

Poland

14. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the UK's relations with Poland. [77176]

Mr. MacShane: Relations between the UK and Poland are excellent.

Pakistan

16. **Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the outcome of the recent provincial and parliamentary elections. [77178]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We welcome the holding of multi-party elections in Pakistan. They are an important milestone in Pakistan's on-going transition to democracy. The next crucial step is the transfer of power to the new National Assembly and establishing its role. We are committed to remaining engaged with Pakistan throughout the transition.

Israel

17 **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. [77179]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Lasting security can only be achieved through a negotiated settlement, not through force. We are committed to reviving final status negotiations by the end of the year. They must have explicitly as their aims an Israeli state free from terror and a viable Palestinian state based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397. We fully support the efforts of the Quartet to agree a roadmap which sets out a series of steps, leading to a final and comprehensive settlement by 2005. The priority now is to agree and implement the roadmap.

21 **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what areas of *(a)* disagreement and *(b)* agreement he has with the US Administration about the Israel-Palestinian negotiations. [77183]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In the House on 25 June my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary welcomed the approach to restarting the peace process set out in President Bush's speech of 24 June. We continue to work closely with the US to turn President Bush's vision of a final settlement within three years into a reality. What ever tactical disagreements might arise we are committed to working together to resolve them without delay.

29. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent initiatives he has undertaken to promote a peaceful dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. [77192]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Lasting security can only be achieved through a negotiated settlement, not through force. We are committed to reviving final status negotiations by the end of the year. They must have explicitly as their aims an Israeli state free from terror and a viable Palestinian state based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397. We fully support the efforts of the Quartet to agree a roadmap which sets out a series of steps, leading to a final and comprehensive settlement by 2005. The priority now is to agree and implement the roadmap.

34. **Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, What action he is taking to secure a peace settlement in the Middle East on the basis of UN Resolutions 242 and 338. [77197]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Lasting security can only be achieved through a negotiated settlement, not through force. We are committed to reviving final status negotiations by the end of the year. They must have explicitly as their aims an Israeli state free from terror and a viable Palestinian state based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397. We fully support the efforts of the Quartet to agree a roadmap which sets out a series of steps, leading to a final and comprehensive settlement by 2005. The priority now is to agree and implement the roadmap.

Nigeria

18. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to tackle the human rights abuses involved in Northern Nigeria states' use of Sharia law. [77180]

Mr. Rammell: In September my noble Friend Baroness Amos, the Minister for Africa, raised with President Obasanjo HMG's concerns about the harsh sentences imposed under the Sharia penal codes. She

emphasised the strength of feeling against them in the UK and reiterated HMG's opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances. The high commission, together with EU partners, regularly raises our concerns about the sentences with the appropriate authorities in Nigeria.

Zimbabwe

20. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with EU counterparts on the political situation in Zimbabwe. [77182]

Mr. Rammell: We regularly discuss Zimbabwe with our EU partners, at official, ministerial and Heads of Government level. We have worked hard to achieve an EU consensus on policy towards Zimbabwe. This resulted in the EU's Common Position of 18 February, which imposed an EU wide travel ban and an assets freeze on key members of the Mugabe regime. The EU has extended the sanctions twice since February and they now apply to 79 people. We are in regular contact with EU partners to ensure that the sanctions are applied in accordance with the Common Position.

Our dialogue with EU partners on Zimbabwe is on-going. The Minister for Africa, Baroness Amos, is travelling to Maputo in Mozambique this week, for talks between EU Foreign Ministers and Ministers representing the 14 SADC countries.

Finland

22. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on bilateral relations with Finland. [77184]

Mr. MacShane: Bilateral relations are good. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last met the Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen bilaterally in London on 21 October and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met his Finnish opposite Erkki Tuomioja on 27 September. We are close EU partners and trading with Finland.

Kashmir

24. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussion he has had with his counterparts in India and Pakistan about human rights abuses in Kashmir. [77186]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, has raised human rights abuses regularly with the Governments of India and Pakistan, including during his last visit to the region on 18–20 July. I also recently discussed a wide range of human rights issues, including Kashmir, during my visit to India on 17 October.

Mr. Peter Devlin

25. **Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken in the case of *(a)* Peter Devlin from Falmouth and *(b)* other divers involved in the Friesland salvage. [77187]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: When our consular staff in Madrid were notified on 21 June of the men's detention they contacted the court and were told that Mr. Devlin and the other divers had been released pending further investigations. Our consular staff in London have spoken to Mr. Devlin on five occasions about the matter and our Honorary Consul in Vigo spoke to the judge hearing the case who confirmed that some, but not all, of the men's equipment would be released. My noble Friend Baroness Amos wrote to my hon. Friend on 11 October explaining that this was a legal matter and that the company should be guided by its lawyer.

EU Enlargement

26. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make a statement on progress towards EU enlargement. [77188]

Mr. MacShane: In line with the objective first set by the Prime Minister, the Brussels European Council agreed that ten candidate countries should be ready to join the EU in 2004 (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). It also confirmed the objective of completing negotiations with these countries this year. Brussels also confirmed that enlargement will not stop there. The UK welcomes the progress made by Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey.

Colombia

30. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, What recent discussions he has had with the Colombian Government in connection with their efforts to restore peace and security. [77193]

Mr. Rammell: My hon. Friend the Minister for Europe visited Colombia from 6–8 October. He met President Uribe and other Ministers, and representatives of British and Colombian NGOs and Colombian Trade Unions. He emphasised our willingness to help tackle Colombia's grave problems as well as the importance of further progress on human rights.

Iraq

31. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, What recent discussions his Department has had with the US Administration concerning Iraq. [77194]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We regularly discuss Iraq with the United States and our other Security Council partners. It is essential that we maintain the pressure on Iraq to comply with its obligations under UN resolutions, including on disarmament, through a tough new United Nations resolution that will ensure the weapons inspectors can complete their task effectively.

37. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, If he will make a statement on the UN weapons inspection programme for Iraq. [77200]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC and the Director-General of the IAEA are responsible for ensuring that a work programme for

inspections in Iraq is drawn up. It is envisaged that the task of drawing up a work programme will take some 45 days after the arrival in Iraq of inspection teams. The work programme will then be put before the UN Security Council for approval.

Iran

32. **Mrs. Calton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, What steps are being taken by the Government to encourage the Government of Iran to guarantee human rights for all its citizens. [77195]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We raise human rights issues with the Iranian authorities at all levels. My right honourable Friend the Foreign Secretary did so while in Iran on 9 October. We supported the recent EU decision to establish a formal dialogue on human rights with Iran with the hope that this will bring about improvements in Iran's respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We have made clear that we expect to see concrete results and will assess progress before taking a decision on whether to sponsor a resolution at the Commission on Human Rights.

Convention on the Future of Europe

35. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the Convention on the Future of Europe. [77198]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my honourable Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to my honourable Friend the Member for Rhonnda.

Arms Sales

36. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the breach of UN sanctions by European countries on the sale of arms. [77199]

Mr. Rammell: The Government works to ensure the rigorous enforcement of United Nations (UN) Sanctions and takes all breaches very seriously. When the Government receives information regarding an alleged breach by a third country we raise the issue with the country concerned. We also where appropriate ensure that the breach is acted on by the relevant UN Sanctions Committee.

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans are in place to provide continuing security to Afghanistan through the International Security Assistance Force. [79664]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The United Nations Security Council Resolution authorising the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul and its immediate environs will expire on 20 December. There is, however, a clear need for ISAF to remain in Kabul for the foreseeable future. We are in discussion with our UN partners about an extension beyond that date. The provisional offer made by Germany and the Netherlands on 24 September to replace Turkey as lead nation of ISAF is very welcome and is an important sign of the international community's continued commitment to sustaining ISAF for as long as it is required.

Bali

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the remains of British citizens killed in the Bali bombing to be returned to relatives in the United Kingdom. [79524]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The remains of 14 victims of the Bali bombing have been repatriated.

We are still awaiting the positive identification of three British victims. This is expected to be completed within the next few weeks.

Four British Citizens are still missing.

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the British Government are giving to the Indonesian and Australian authorities who are engaged in the identification process of those murdered in the Bali bombing. [79525]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We immediately sent a team of police officers led by the anti-terrorism branch to Bali including investigators, family liaison officers and officers skilled in identification processes. A UK coroner and pathologist travelled to Bali to ensure the Indonesian/Australian identification and repatriation processes were in line with ours. Police and consular staff are present throughout the day in the local mortuary. British police also arranged for relatives' DNA samples both in the UK and overseas to be taken and transferred to Australia for profiling.

Beryllium

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's Answer of 22nd October, *Official Report*, column 247W, on beryllium, what end-use monitoring has been undertaken in relation to the export of beryllium to Iran. [78875]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As stated by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (Mr Nigel Griffiths) on 28 October 2002, *Offical Report*, Columns 531–532W, the Government attaches great importance to ensuring that UK exports are not misused, diverted or re-exported to undesirable end-uses. A risk assessment was made at the licensing stage of this export, including careful examination of information about the proposed end-use and end-user of the goods. We continue to believe that the export of less than half an ounce of beryllium to the University of Science and Technology in Tehran is not of concern with respect to use in weapons of mass destruction and that the end-use stated in the original export licence application was legitimate. In these circumstances we have considered end-use monitoring not to be necessary for this export.

Bus Lanes (Government Cars)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a Government car service vehicle in which he was a passenger last travelled outside the exempted hours on bus lanes; and what exemption there is to rules about passenger cars using bus lanes in central London for ministerial cars. [78488]

Mr. Straw: The official vehicles in which I travel are not operated by the Government car service. They are adapted for police use, and are driven by police officers who are subject to the same provisions of the law as other officers in similar circumstances.

Cayman Islands

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what developments there have been in the constitutional review process in the Cayman Islands. [79982]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have now completed our review of the report of the Constitutional Review Commissioners and associated papers, forwarded by the Governor of the Cayman Islands in August. We have invited representatives of both Government and Opposition parties to an informal meeting in London on 9–11 December to discuss how to take the various proposals forward. I have made arrangements for the relevant reports to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Eritrea

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he will make to the Eritrean authorities concerning persecution of evangelical Christians in that country. [79190]

Mr. Rammell: In May this year, the Ministry of Information ordered all minority religious groups to register or cease all activities. The outcome of the registration process is not yet clear.

Our Ambassador in Asmara, along with other EU Missions, raised the issue of human rights at every opportunity. He discussed the issue of registration of minority churches with the relevant Minister in June.

We will continue to raise breaches of fundamental human rights bilaterally and with EU Partners.

Guatemala

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the attacks carried out against human rights workers in Guatemala; [78774]

(2) what assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Guatemala; [78773]

(3) what representations he has made to the Government of Guatemala regarding implementation of the commitments it made to the Grupo Consultivo in February. [78775]

Mr. Rammell: The human rights situation in Guatemala has improved since the end of the civil war in 1996. But it remains unsatisfactory. MINUGUA (UN Verification Mission to Guatemala) has expressed deep concern at the increase in intimidation against human rights activists, politicians, members of the judiciary and media involved in efforts to confront impunity. The UK shares MINUGUA's concerns and will continue to work with the EU to urge the Government of Guatemala to take all necessary measures to protect these groups and bring human rights abusers to justice quickly.

When my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) visited Guatemala in May this year he saw for himself the difficulties facing human rights defenders. In his discussions with the Government, he emphasised the importance HMG attaches to human rights.

HMG urges the Government of Guatemala to implement all unfulfilled commitments under the Peace Accords, particularly those relating to human rights. The UK, with the EU, will continue to monitor the human rights' situation in Guatemala, and the Government's efforts to honour their commitments.

International donors (including the UK) will review the Guatemalan Government's progress at the follow-up meeting of the Consultative Group (The "Group Consultivo")in spring 2003. This will not be a formality.

Lisbon Council

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on the economic objectives agreed at the Lisbon Council. [77171]

Mr. MacShane: There has been progress in the sense of 5 million new jobs in the EU since 2000, and cheaper telephone calls thanks to telecom liberalisation but the EU needs to go further in order to advance its ambition of being the world's most dynamic and job creating economy by 2010.

Ministerial Meetings (Namibia)

Mr Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the President of Namibia; whether he discussed the present land situation in Zimbabwe; what other matters were discussed; what plans he has to assess the need for a legal programme of land resettlement in Namibia; and if he will make a statement. [78804]

Mr. Rammell: *[holding reply of 4 November].* We support the need for land reform in Namibia, but any programme must be transparent and within the rule of law. My noble Friend the Minister for Africa met the Namibian Foreign Minister on 17 September. She raised our concerns about land reform in both Namibia and Zimbabwe. On the same day, President Nujoma addressed the Namibian Agricultural Union assuring them that land reform would proceed within the rule of law and would be transparent.

PLO (Intifada)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on negotiations with Chairman Arafat of the PLO regarding the intifada. [78441]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: International efforts are currently focussed on ending violence in Israel and the Occupied Territories, including the current intifada, by restarting a process of negotiation which will lead to a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We continue to give those efforts our full support.

Poppy Farming

28. Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the change in levels of poppy farming since the overthrow of the Taliban regime. [77190]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK contributes funds to the opium poppy survey in Afghanistan conducted by the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. It reported on 25 October that poppy cultivation in 2002 was 74,000 hectares. This is more than in 2001, but significantly less than the record level in 1999 when 91,583 hectares were cultivated.

Prisoners (Peru)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he will make to the Peruvian Government concerning *(a)* the imprisonment of Olga Gonzalez Zevallos, Jorge Julian Godoy and Carlos Yalle Laura and *(b)* the incarceration of other prisoners who have been recommended for release by the Peruvian Government's Pardoning Commission. [79189]

Mr. Rammell: Our Embassy in Lima last raised these cases with the Peruvian Ministry of Justice on 31 October. The Ministry said that the cases are being reviewed but admit delays are occurring in the process due to lack of resources.

Private Sector Secondments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what committee within his Department overseas the placement and monitoring of secondments from outside organisations to his Department. [78154]

Mr. Rammell: British Trade International—the joint DTI/FCO body responsible for trade development and promotion of inward investment—overseas the placement and monitoring of secondments from outside organisations to Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In doing so BTI respects the Cabinet Office guidelines on interchange and the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code.

Radio Voice of Hope

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department is contributing towards the South Sudanese radio station Radio Voice of Hope. [79386]

Mr. Rammell: HMG has not contributed to Radio Voice of Hope.

Somalia

19 **Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the situation in Somalia. [77181]

Mr. Rammell: I join the international community in welcoming the ceasefire deal signed on 27 October by Somali groups taking part in the peace and reconciliation conference at Eldoret. I hope it will pave the way for a return to peace and stability in Somalia.

Sudan

15. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the *(a)* situation and *(b)* peace negotiations in Sudan. [77177]

Mr. Rammell: The Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army resumed the peace talks on 14 October and have agreed a cessation of hostilities and unrestricted humanitarian access for the duration of the talks. We welcome these developments and shall continue to provide our full support as they work for a just and lasting peace.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the status of Operation Lifeline Sudan; and whether flights are reaching those people in need of food and other necessities. [79387]

Mr. Rammell: Operation Lifeline Sudan remains the principal mechanism by which humanitarian assistance is provided to war-affected areas in Sudan. The UN and the Humanitarian Affairs Commission and the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Authority met in Nairobi on 25 October, they discussed the implementation of unrestricted humanitarian access agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding on the Cessation of Hostilities on 17 October. We warmly welcome these developments.

We continue to urge all parties to give all possible help to the UN and non governmental organisations (NGOs) to ensure speedy delivery of humanitarian assistance. Our Ambassador in Khartoum raised the general issue of humanitarian access with the Sudanese Minister of International Co-operation on 24 October.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on funding arrangements through the UNHCR for refugees in the Sudan. [79388]

Mr. Rammell: This year the UK is providing a core contribution of £14 million to UNHCR and in each of the following years (£56 million over four years). Sudan is one of UNHCR'spriorities.

Sudan-Eritrea Relations

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between Sudan and Eritrea. [79385]

Mr. Rammell: Relations between Sudan and Eritrea were formally restored in January 2000. Recent tension caused by fighting in eastern Sudan has affected relations between the two countries. But this has eased since the signing on 17 October of a Memorandum of Understanding on a cessation of hostilities between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army.

Taiwan

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Taiwan. [79035]

Mr. Rammell: HMG does not recognise Taiwan as an independent state. We acknowledge the position of the Chinese Government that Taiwan is a province of the People's Republic of China. Taiwan is one of the world's largest economies and a key economic partner for the UK. Although we do not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, we are keen to develop further economic, financial, cultural, educational, science and technology and other exchanges where we have mutual interests. The British Trade and Cultural Office in Taipei actively promotes these exchanges and represents British interests in Taiwan in the absence of formal relations.

Terrorism

33. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, If he will make a statement about the state of the international coalition against terrorism. [77196]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The coalition against terrorism that we helped to build in the aftermath of 11 September remains resolute in its objective to eradicate terrorism as a force in international affairs. It has a long list of achievements to its credit: apart from Afghanistan, terrorists have been disrupted and arrested around the world, and there have been significant steps forward in international cooperation. But we have no illusions about how much more needs to be done.

Trade Relations

27. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to promote trade relations between India and the United Kingdom. [77189]

Mr. Rammell: Trade Partners UK is a joint FCO and DTI organisation, established to enhance the competitiveness of companies in the UK through overseas sales and investments. It has a comprehensive business plan to help UK firms expand their activity in the Indian Market. This includes a wide range of activities in business sectors where there are commercial opportunities.

The New Delhi Declaration signed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in January this year, includes a section highlighting the importance of our bilaterial trade and investment relationship.

Uzbekistan

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's relations with Uzbekistan with particular reference to human rights and religious freedom. [76657]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK's relationship with Uzbekistan is developing well. Since 1992 we have seen Embassies established both in Uzbekistan and the UK. Both are extremely active and are doing much to bring the relationship forward. Education and drugs co-operation are key elements of that relationship.

Much of the UK's work in Uzbekistan is devoted to pressing for improvements in the human rights situation. Bilaterally, and through the EU and the OSCE, we have urged Uzbekistan to take greater steps towards democratisation and respect for human rights. We recognise that there have been some small steps to address the human rights situation, including an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur for Torture. But Uzbekistan needs to do much more. In particular, we would like to see reform of the criminal justice system, and wider recognition of independent human rights groups, religious groups and political parties. We stand ready to help Uzbekistan make these improvements, in line with its international obligations and commitments.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking, within the United Nations, to secure the right of unrestricted access of weapons inspectors to identify whether Russia has been acquiring undeclared weapons of mass destruction. [78569]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Russia is a State Party to all the major arms control treaties governing weapons of mass destruction—the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Russia already complies with the inspection requirements imposed by its treaty obligations.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the United Kingdom Government and the Government of Zimbabwe. [78442]

Mr. Rammell: Relations between the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe are poorer than at any time since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. The ZANU (PF) regime has undermined the democratic principles on which an independent Zimbabwe was founded. It has manipulated the democratic process to retain power, as clearly seen during the presidential election in March and in elections since. It has used violence, intimidation and the withholding of food aid to cow the opposition and gain political advantage. It has seriously undermined the independence of the judiciary and subverted the rule of law. It has systematically attacked Zimbabwe's free and independent media. Its record on human rights abuses is appalling. Its economic and land policies are major contributors to the current humanitarian crisis. Relations between the UK and Zimbabwe will not improve until a government in Harare makes a genuine attempt to address these concerns.

HEALTH

Cancer

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to include figures for patients awaiting diagnostic tests in the national cancer waiting lists currently published by the NHS. [75771]

Ms Blears: The NHS Cancer Plan set out waiting time targets for cancer. These targets aim to reduce the amount of time patients have to wait from urgent referral to beginning treatment, which will include the diagnostic phase, and from diagnosis of cancer to first treatment. We have no plans to include waiting times for individual diagnostic tests in cancer waiting times monitoring.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received concerning the number of patients that have been denied treatment with specific cancer drugs, including Herceptin, owing to delays in obtaining NICE guidance. [75801]

Ms Blears: Prior to publication of recommendations by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE), the Department received numerous representations about the availability of Glivec for the treatment of chronic myeloid leukaemia; Herceptin for the treatment of breast cancer and MabThera for the treatment of follicular lymphoma.

The appraisal process, from referral to completion, has been designed to allow the full participation of patients, clinicians, companies and stakeholders. NICE is fully aware of the need to ensure that the process is as streamlined as possible, without losing any of the important safeguards it contains, in order to publish guidance soon after the treatments are launched.

It is not acceptable for funding authorities to refuse to fund a newly licensed treatment just because it is awaiting appraisal by NICE. Decisions on funding should be based on local consideration of the available evidence when NICE appraisals are awaited.

Acute Beds

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute beds there were in each of the last five years; and how many he expects there to be in the next 12 months. [78698]

Mr. Hutton: The average daily number of beds in acute wards in England since 1996 is:

Year	*Acute beds*
1996–1997	108,869
1997–1998	107,807
1998–1999	107,729
1999–2000	107,218
2000–2001	107,956

Source:
Department of Health form KH03

The NHS Plan made a commitment to increase the number of beds in general & acute wards by 2,100 by 2004.

BCG Vaccination

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the suspension of BCG vaccination programmes in schools. [78849]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* There have been concerns over the school BCG programme following Evans Vaccines Ltd. withdrawing all batches of the BCG vaccine as a precautionary measure. However, the Danish company Statens Serum Institut (SSI) were granted a trading licence by the Medicines Control Agency for its BCG vaccine on 9 September this year.

Stocks of SSI's BCG vaccine are currently being packaged for the UK market and we hope to receive this in mid-November. Once BCG supplies are available, the priority will be to vaccinate those at highest risk of tuberculosis, principally new born babies whose parents are from higher risk communities or who live in high risk areas. The schools programme will then follow on afterwards.

Biological Drugs

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he intends to provide to patients regarding the safe *(a)* transport, *(b)* storage and *(c)* use of biological drugs. [78489]

Ms Blears: information regarding the transport, storage and use of biological drugs is specifically provided on the product label and, in more detail, in the patient information leaflet (PIL). The PIL is supplied with the packaged product. Information and advice on transport, storage and handling of each medicinal product is based upon the scientific data, including the stability of the drug in the final packaging, which is evaluated as part of the marketing authorisation application.

Biotechnology

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies he has funded this year to consider the impact of patenting biotechnology inventions on health care provision; for what purpose such studies were funded; and when they will be published. [77875]

Ms Blears: The Department has commissioned an independent study into the impact and management of intellectual property rights within the health care sector. This fulfils the commitment made in the Government's response to the report on human genetic databases from the Select Committee on Science and Technology in the other place. The study is proceeding in two stages. The first stage is complete and a report entitled "Identification of Intellectual Property Rights Relating to Healthcare" was published in September 2002. A conference to discuss the outputs of the second stage of the study and to build a consensus on possible actions is being planned for 12 February 2003.

Blood Products

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to submit all blood and blood derivative products available in the United Kingdom to the Medicines Control Agency; [75003]

(2) what plans he has for all plasma products to be evaluated by NICE. [75005]

Ms Blears: There are no plans to submit blood and blood components to the Medicines Control Agency for licensing. We do not believe that doing so would confer any additional public health benefit. The Medicines Control Agency already ensures that the United Kingdom blood services meet European good manufacturing practice standards. In addition, the new European Blood Directive will, when adopted, require the accreditation of all blood establishments to ensure common standards of safety and quality in blood and blood components across all Members States. We have no plans to refer the use of all plasma products to NICE for evaluation. Safety issues relating to plasma products fall within the remit of the United Kingdom expert advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues for transplantation (MSBT). MSBT seeks specialist advice where necessary or includes the relevant specialists among its members.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the safety of fresh frozen plasma and methylene blue treated plasma; and if he will make a statement. [75004]

Ms Blears: The Government's advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues for transplantation (MSBT) is continuing to consider the relative efficacy and risks of the different types of fresh frozen plasma (FFP) available. United Kingdom FFP is already a very safe product. To minimise the risk from viruses, it is made only from previously tested blood donors. The current high levels of safety are achieved by screening out potential high risk donors and then further testing every unit of donated blood for the presence of infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. FFP produced by the national blood service (NBS), using UK donors, has also been leucodepleted to remove white cells, which evidence suggests may carry the greatest risk of transmitting vOD. Over 300,000 units of FFP are issued annually and it is only given in life-threatening situations to prevent or stop haemorrhage associated with abnormal blood clotting. MSBT has recommended importing single unit FFP from the United States. On 15 August 2002 the Government announced that imported FFP will be used for new-born babies and young children born after 1 January 1996, as an added precaution against the theoretical risk of vCJD transmission. On the advice of MSBT, US sourced FFP will be virally inactivated using methylene blue (MB) treatment. MB has been administered in medical practice since 1900, and in much larger doses (many thousand-fold) than the NBS will be using. NBS will be removing more than 90 per cent, of MB before the FFP is issued to National Health Service hospitals. MB is a registered medical device under the Medical Devices Directive and has a European safety (CE) marking.

Cardiac Surgical Services

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further cardiac surgical services are planned in West London; and when they will be operational. [77970]

Mr. Hutton: The parallel developments at Hammersmith Hospital and the Paddington Basin will see the creation of two specialist centres for heart surgery in north west London in modern facilities to replace the existing centres. The two centres will provide benefits of greater service concentration, including integration with a wider range of services, and a strengthened teaching and research capacity. Whilst the developments are underway investment is being made to improve existing services. This includes creating more surgical capacity where possible and replacing worn out equipment, including operating theatres and catheter laboratories to ensure that services continue to improve in line with patient and Government expectations.

Child Protection

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many child protection officers who had been in post for more than one year were active in each London borough and metropolitan borough in the last year; [78018]

(2) how many child protection officers were active in each London borough and metropolitan borough in each of the past five years. [78017]

Jacqui Smith: Data on the number of staff working in child protection are not available centrally.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role the Department of Health plays in ensuring adequate child protection among vulnerable families living in Army garrisons. [78029]

Jacqui Smith: Local authorities have the statutory responsibility for the protection of the children of service families, including those living in army garrisons. All three armed services also provide professional welfare support, including "special to type" social work services and, in some cases, medical services to augment those provided by local authorities. When UK service families are based overseas, the responsibility for the protection of their children is vested with the Ministry of Defence.

The Department of Health, the Home Office and the Department for Education and Employment, in jointly revising the "Working Together to Safeguard Children" child protection guidance, were careful to remember the particular needs of children living in army garrisons. Appendix 2 of this guidance provides points of contact for armed forces arrangements for child protection.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to continue the pilot project for dealing with small clinical negligence claims; and if he will make a statement. [77917]

Mr. Hutton: The Chief Medical Officer has been reviewing arrangements for handling clinical negligence claims. Plans to implement any future measures for handling clinical negligence claims will be developed later this year in the light of Ministers consideration of the Chief Medical Officer's recommendations for reform.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 25 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Ms J. Hamnett. [79446]

Mr. Milburn: A reply was sent to my right hon. Friend on 4 November.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to fund research into finding a cure for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. [77617]

Mr. Hutton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) on 30 October.

District Nurses

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many initial contacts per district nurse there were in each of the past five years. [78056]

Mr. Hutton: District nurses are registered nurses who have undertaken further training as specialist community practitioners (district nursing). Most district nurses lead teams of staff nurses and health care assistants who will not have been included in the figures requested.

The number of initial contacts per whole time equivalent district nurse in the past five years is shown in the following table.

Year	*Number of initial contacts per district nurse (w.t.e.)*
1997–98	5.1
1998–99	4.9
1999–2000	5.1
2000–01	5.4
2001–02	5.4

Source:
Department of Health, Statistics Division Form KC56 and non-medical workforce census

Domiciliary Oxygen Service

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the review of the domiciliary oxygen service to be concluded. [78094]

Ms Blears: The review is at an advanced stage, but I cannot say at present when it will be completed.

Finnish Nurses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Finnish nurses are employed by the NHS. [77623]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the numbers of Finnish nurses employed in the National Health Service is not collected centrally.

There is currently no government to government arrangement with Finland regarding the recruitment of Finnish nurses.

Focus Group Research

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what use he and his Department has made of focus group research since June 2001; if he will identify for each research project the topics covered, the person or organisation carrying out the research, and the total cost; and if he will publish the research on his Department's website. [74993]

Ms Blears: A table listing focus groups and their purpose carried out by my Department since June 2001 has been placed in the Library. The Department's expenditure on these can only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Health Allocation (Review)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* guidelines and *(b)* criteria are for the review of health allocation to local health trusts. [78616]

Mr. Hutton: The existing formula used to allocate National Health Service resources has been reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation (ACRA). ACRA's terms of reference are to advise the Secretary of State for Health on the distribution of resources across primary and secondary care. Guidelines for the review are to put in place new mechanisms to distribute NHS cash more fairly and that the healthcare needs of populations, including the impact of deprivation, will be the driving force in determining where the cash goes. The main criterion of the review has been to contribute to the reduction in avoidable health inequalities.

Health Inequalities

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of inequalities in access to health care services in England and their relationship with income inequality; and if he will make a statement. [77797]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The NHS Plan emphasised the importance of reducing inequalities in access to national health service service as part of an overall effort to improve health and reduce inequality.

Following the assessment of the Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health, it recognised that the worst health problems will not be tackled without dealing with their fundamental causes, including poverty and economic and social disadvantage.

That is why we introduced national health inequalities targets in 2001:

> starting with children under one year, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10 per cent., the gap in mortality between "routine and manual" groups and the population as a whole.
>
> starting with local authorities, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10 per cent., the gap between the fifth of areas with the lowest life expectancy at birth and the population as a whole.

and gave priority to improving access of care to all services and reducing health inequalities in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: The Next Three Years", the priorities and planning framework for 2003–06 published on 2 October.

Health Service Finance

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account he will take of rurality in his revised allocation formula for funding primary care trusts. [78460]

Mr. Hutton: The existing formula used to allocate national health service resources has been reviewed by the advisory committee on resource allocation (ACRA). We are currently considering ACRA's recommendations. Later this autumn when we announce the revenue allocations for the next three years we will explain changes to the formula.

Imported Poultry

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average time taken to test a consignment of imported poultry meat for the presence of nitrofurans has been in the last year for which figures are available. [77825]

Ms Blears: Information provided by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland (DARDNI), who carry out the testing of poultrymeat from Thailand for nitrofurans, shows the average turnaround time, from 22 May when the first results were reported to 25 October 2002, to be eight days from receipt of sample. 90 per cent. of samples within this time period were analysed within the agreed 10 day turnaround time.

There are no figures available for the turnaround time for the testing for nitrofurans in Brazilian poultrymeat as testing has only recently commenced.

Infected Blood Transfusion

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's estimate is of the number of hepatitis C sufferers who contracted the virus from NHS blood transfusions. [75497]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 October 2002]:* A lookback programme conducted by the national blood service from 1995 identified 669 people who contracted the hepatitis C virus from blood transfusions before screening for thevirus was introduced in September 1991. However, it has been impossible to trace the majority of those likely to have been infected. Work has been undertaken to estimate the numbers involved and we expect the results to be published later this year.

Jams Regulations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the maximum penalties are for breaches of the Jams Regulations; and what the maximum penalties he intends for breaches of the EC Jams Directive (2001/113/EC). [77824]

Ms Blears: The maximum penalties for an offence under the Jams and Similar Products Regulations 1981 are: on summary conviction, a fine not exceeding 5,000; on conviction or indictment, a unlimited fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or both.

New domestic regulations are being prepared to implement Directive 2001/113. It is intended, subject to the outcome of a full public consultation, that the maximum penalty for an offence under the forthcoming Regulations will be a fine not exceeding £5,000. This is in line with the penalties provided by comparable compositional legislation for other foodstuffs.

Latex-free Equipment

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the guidelines to the NHS regarding the provision of, and access to, latex-free material and equipment. [77019]

Mr. Hutton: Guidance issued to the national health service relating to latex and latex-free equipment is based on the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, and is intended to remind NHS managers of their duty to comply with that legislation in assessing risks to their staff.

A wide range of latex-free equipment is now being manufactured and many companies are now moving away from using latex in their products altogether. There are no cost implications associated with using latex-free equipment, and the latest data from NHS Logistics suggest that NHS employers are increasingly moving to latex-free equipment.

MRSA

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people contacted MRSA and in which hospitals in 2001. [77963]

Ms Blears: These figures are not available as information on Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) infections, apart from MRSA blood stream infections, is not collated centrally. Mandatory reporting of MRSA blood stream infections was introduced for all acute national health service trusts on 1 April 2001 and data are routinely published. Results by individual trust for the first year of this scheme (April 2001 to March 2002) were published in the Communicable Disease Report Weekly on 20 June 2002 and are available on the Public Health Laboratory Service website www.phls.co.uk/publications/cdr/PDFfiles/2002/cdr2502.pdf.

National Alcohol Reduction Strategy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many copies of the National Alcohol Reduction Strategy Consultation Paper have been sent out to user groups in the voluntary and commercial sectors. [78180]

Ms Blears: *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The Government launched the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy Consultation Document on 15 October 2002, and the consultation period will run until 15 January 2003. Copies of the consultation document have been placed on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/alcohol/alcoholstrategy.htm and on the strategy unit website www.strategy.gov.uk/2002/alcohol/consultationdocument.shtml.

The Government are keen to receive a wide range of responses from all stakeholders including user groups. The document has been circulated either in hard copy or electronically to a wide range of interested groups, including representatives of the alcohol counselling and prevention services (ACAPS), the alcohol service users national alliance (ASUNA) and the London drug and alcohol network (LDAN).

NHS Finance

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost per patient of alcohol and drug rehabilitation on the NHS was in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [78532]

Ms Blears: There are around 3,100 bedspaces within the drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation sector. The cost per week, per patient, varies from around £250 for a placement within hostel accommodation to around £1000 for a placement within a medical/clinical facility. There is no information collected at present on community rehabilitation programmes, although work is being developed on this by the national treatment agency.

NHS Information Technology

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* the personal responsibilities of the Director General of NHS Information Technology, *(b)* his responsibility for the NHS Information Authority and *(c)* his role in directing the implementation of NHS information technology at regional level. [76323]

Ms Blears: Richard Granger has been appointed as Director General of Information Technology in the national health service and is responsible for delivering the national programme for IT. This focuses on the key developments that will make a significant difference to improving the patient experience and the delivery of care and services. There are four key deliverables: electronic appointment booking, an electronic care records service, an electronic prescribing service and an underpinning IT infrastructure with sufficient connectivity and broadband capacity to support the critical national applications and local systems.

Gwyn Thomas is the Chief Executive of the NHS Information Authority (NHSIA), which is a special health authority. Richard Granger will be working closely with the NHSIA, the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency and the Information Policy Unit in the Department of Health. Working together and maintaining strong working relationships will be important for all parties.

In the new NHS planning system, strategic health authorities (StHAs) are responsible for producing local delivery plans that will link sound local investment plans on IT into the national arrangements and framework. Richard Granger will be working through StHAs to ensure that for IT, the focus is on the key deliverables for the national IT programme. He will work with the chief executives and chief information officers at each StHA to ensure that progress is maintained against the critical path for implementation. The chief information officers will report to both their own chief executives and to Richard Granger.

NHS Organisations (Running Costs)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total running costs of NHS organisations serving *(a)* Portsmouth South and *(b)* Hampshire were in 1997; what the totals are now; and if he will make a statement. [78965]

Ms Blears: The total expenditure of the local provider organisations serving the former Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority area in 1997–98 was £242.9 million. This included Portsmouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust and Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust. The total forecast out-turn expenditure in 2002–03 for Portsmouth Hospitals Trust and the provider functions of the East Hampshire, Fareham and Gosport and Portsmouth City Primary Care Trusts is £383.6 million. It is not possible to provide information for the Portsmouth South constituency.

The total expenditure by health authorities in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in 1997–98 was £971.7 million and the forecast outturn expenditure in 2002–03 for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority and the 10 constituent primary care trusts which have commissioning functions is £1,501.4 million.

In both cases it is difficult to make direct comparisons between 1997–98 expenditure and 2002–03 forecast out-turn expenditure because of the various organisational changes which have taken place in the intervening years.

NHS Services (Hampshire)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed to carry out administration for NHS services for residents of *(a)* Portsmouth South and *(b)* Hampshire in 1997; how many are employed; and if he will make a statement. [78963]

Ms Blears: Information is not collected centrally by constituency. Information by health authority is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health service (HCHS): administration staff[1] within specific health authority areas as at 30 September

	Wholetime equivalents		*Headcount*	
Code/health authority	*1997*	*2001*	*1997*	*2001*
All administration staff	4,490	5,370	5,540	6,600
QD1 North and Mid Hants	1,130	1,340	1,420	1,650
QD3 Southampton and SW Hants	1,570	1,910	1,870	2,290
QD4 Isle of Wight	370	[3]—	450	[3]—
QD2 Portsmouth and SE Hants	1,420	[3]—	1,800	[3]—
QEV Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and SE Hants[2]	[3]—	2,120	[3]—	2,660

[1] Administration staff comprises of senior managers, managers, clerical and administrative staff.

[2] Isle of Wight HA and Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA merged in 2001 to become Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA.
[3] Not applicable.
Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Due to rounding, totals may not equal the sum of the component parts.
3. 2001 is the most recent year for which information is available.
Source:
Department of Health non-medical workforce census

NHS Trusts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mergers between NHS acute services trusts there have been in each year since trusts were formed. [76264]

Mr. Hutton: A list of all national health service trusts that have been involved in major reconfigurations since 1991–92 have been placed in the Library. Most of these have merged by dissolution and establishment of new NHS trusts, but there are also absorption mergers and parts of NHS trusts involved in the formation of new NHS trusts and primary care trusts.

NHS Work Force Statistics

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the next NHS workforce statistics. [78183]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Figures for 30 September 2002 are due to be published in February 2003, in line with timing for previous years.

NICE

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list members of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence who are ethicists. [78954]

Ms Blears: The constitution of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's board reflects its primary role of providing clear guidance on clinical and cost effectiveness to the national health service. It does not include any members appointed specifically because of their formal training in ethics.

Number of Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of doctors per head of population in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each other European Union country; and if he will make a statement; [76295]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses per 1,000 head of population in England; and if he will make a statement. [77798]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the tables.

The comparative information about the number of doctors in the United Kingdom and the European Union is published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the latest figures are shown in the table. However, these figures need to be interpreted with caution because different countries calculate the figures in different ways. If comparing United Kingdom data with other countries, we consistently appear near the bottom for doctors per 1,000 head of population, but this is mainly because we count only national health service doctors, whereas most other countries figures include all registered doctors, therefore counting, for example, private sector doctors and doctors who are not actually working.

Health employment: practising physicians density per 1,000 population

Countries	*2000*
Austria	3.1
Belgium	3.9
Denmark	n/a
Finland	3.1
France	n/a
Germany	3.6
Greece	n/a
Ireland	n/a
Italy	6
Luxembourg	3.1
Netherlands	3.2
Portugal	n/a
Spain	3.3
Sweden	n/a
United Kingdom	1.8

All doctors and qualified nursing, midwifery, health visiting staff and practice nurses per 1,000 population, England, at 30 September 2001

	Numbers per 1,000 population
All doctors	2.0
of which:	
General practitioners[1]	0.6
HCHS medical and dental staff[2]	1.4
All qualified nursing[3]	7.1
of which:	
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	6.7
Practice nurses	0.4

[1] General medical practitioners includes unrestricted principals, PMS salaried GP's, PMS contracted GP's restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (para 52 SFA), PMS and others and GP retainers.
[2] Excludes medical hospital practitioners and medical clinical assistants, most of whom are also general practitioners working part-time in hospitals.
[3] Figures exclude learners and agency staff.
Source:
Department of Health Medical and Dental Work Force Census.Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.Department of Health Non-medical Work Force Census.Office for National Statistics (ONS).
Note:
Population figures are rounded to one decimal point.

Pilot Schemes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the Health Authorities Preparation of Proposals for Pilot Schemes (Personal Medical Services) (Amendment) Directions 2002 were laid before the House on 21 October. [78072]

Mr. Hutton: The Health Authorities Preparation of Proposals for Pilot Schemes (Personal Medical Services) (Amendment) Directions 2002 were not laid before the House on 21 October.

Psychiatrists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many CAMHS psychiatrists were employed in each strategic health authority in each of the past five years. [78020]

Mr. Hutton: The number of child and adolescent psychiatrists is shown in the following table. The number of consultants in the specialty has increased by 9 per cent., between September 1997 and March 2002.

Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): Medical and dental staff within Child and Adolescent Psychiatry by Strategic Health Authority[1]—England[2]

Numbers (headcount)

	1998		1999	
	All staff	Consultant	All staff	Consultant
England	770	460	800	490
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	40	30	40	30
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	20	10	20	10
Birmingham and The Black Country	50	20	40	20
Cheshire and Merseyside	40	30	40	30
Country Durham and Tees Valley	10	10	20	10
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	10	10	10	10
Cumbria and Lancashire	20	10	20	10
Dorset and Somerset	10	10	20	10
Essex	20	10	20	10
Greater Manchester	60	30	50	30
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	30	20	30	20
Kent and Medway	10	10	20	10
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	30	20	30	20
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	40	20	50	30
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	10	10	10	10
North Central London	50	30	50	30
North East London	30	20	30	20
North West London	50	30	40	30
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	20	20	30	20
South East London	40	20	40	30
Shropshire and Staffordshire	20	10	20	10
South East London	40	20	40	30
LondonSouth West London	20	10	30	10
South West Peninsula	10	10	10	10
South Yorkshire	20	10	10	10
Surrey and Sussex	30	20	30	20
Thames Valley	50	20	50	20
Trent	30	20	40	20
West Yorkshire	30	20	30	10

Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): Medical and dental staff within Child and Adolescent Psychiatry by Strategic Health Authority[1]—England[2]

Numbers (headcount)

	2000		2001		March 2002[3]	
	All staff	Consultant	All staff	Consultant	All staff	Consultant
England	830	480	820	490	—	480
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	40	20	40	20	—	20
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	20	10	20	10	—	10
Birmingham and The Black Country	40	20	40	20	—	20
Cheshire and Merseyside	40	30	40	20	—	20
Country Durham and Tees Valley	20	10	20	20	—	20
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	10	10	10	10	—	10
Cumbria and Lancashire	20	10	20	10	—	10
Dorset and Somerset	10	10	20	10	—	10
Essex	10	10	10	10	—	*
Greater Manchester	50	20	50	20	—	20
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	40	20	60	30	—	20
Kent and Medway	20	10	10	10	—	10
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	20	10	20	10	—	10
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	50	30	60	30	—	30
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	10	10	10	10	—	10
North Central London	40	30	40	30	—	30
North East London	20	20	40	20	—	20
North West London	60	30	60	30	—	30
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	30	20	20	20	—	20
Shropshire and Staffordshire	10	10	10	10	—	10
South East London	40	30	40	30	—	30
South West London	20	10	20	20	—	20
South West Peninsula	10	10	10	*	—	*
South Yorkshire	30	10	20	10	—	10
Surrey and Sussex	40	20	40	30	—	30

	2000		2001		March 2002[3]	
	All staff	Consultant	All staff	Consultant	All staff	Consultant
Thames Valley	60	30	60	30	—	30
Trent	40	30	40	30	—	30
West Yorkshire	40	20	30	20	—	20

[1] Staff holding appointments in more than one StHA are included separately in each StHA. The sum of StHA totals therefore differs slightly from the England total and a direct comparison is not advised.
[2] Data are at 31 March 2002 and 30 September in previous years.
[3] March 2002 data were a mini census which counted consultants only.
Notes:
'—' denotes not available
'*' denotes five or less than five
Source:
Department of health medical and dental workforce census.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to maintain standards in the public health laboratories after their privatisation. [78740]

Ms Blears: All the laboratories of the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) are Clinical Pathology Accreditation UK Ltd, accredited. It is envisaged that those PHLS laboratories that will transfer to the National Health Service in the coming months will maintain this accreditation. There is no plan to privatise PHLS laboratories.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public health laboratories will be privatised. [78742]

Ms Blears: None of the laboratories will be privatised. From 1 April 2003, approximately 35 will transfer from the Public Health Laboratory Service to the management of National Health Service trusts. The remainder, approximately ten, will transfer to the Health Protection Agency when it is established.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what co-ordination there will be between public health laboratories; and who will be responsible for checks on them after they are privatised. [78744]

Ms Blears: None of the laboratories will be privatised. The Health Protection Agency will be responsible for monitoring the specialist services across the National Health Service laboratories transferring from the Public Health Laboratory Service, as well as their own laboratories. NHS trusts will be responsible for the routine microbiology services in their own trusts. They will be subject to the same performance monitoring as well by primary care trusts. External accreditation programmes will also remain in place. In time, the laboratories will form part of local pathology managed clinical networks. It is hoped that, until then, informal links will be maintained and strengthened between individual laboratories.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many posts will be lost as a result of changes to the Public Health Laboratory Service. [78786]

Ms Blears: Under the change management protocol which has been agreed with the current employers and the unions concerned, all staff transferring to the Health Protection Agency on its establishment or to a National Health Service trust will have guaranteed continuity of employment until April 2004.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the terms and conditions of employment of staff transferred to the proposed Health Protection Agency will be rationalised so that common terms and conditions apply to all staff, regardless of whether they came from the National Radiological Protection Board or the Public Health Laboratory Service; [78789]

(2) which aspects of health protection are proposed to be dealt with by the proposed Health Protection Agency; and which posts with the Public Health Laboratory Service are to be transferred to the HPA; [78790]

(3) what evaluation has been made of the case for abolition of the Public Health Laboratory Service. [78791]

Ms Blears: "Health Protection: A Consultation Document on creating a health protection agency", published in June 2002, proposed that the agency would take on responsibilities in relation to the control and prevention of infectious disease, including most of the functions of the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS), radiological protection, protection against chemical and poisonous hazards and health emergency planning. All PHLS staff would transfer to the agency, other than those in the laboratories which will transfer to the national health service by 31 March 2003, under separate decisions announced on 3 September. We are currently considering responses to the consultation document and will announce our decisions as soon as possible.

The consultation document also proposed that staff would transfer on their existing terms and conditions of service. Future changes would be a matter for the board of the proposed agency to agree with the recognised trades unions.

Re-offending

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to implement the recommendations relevant to his Department in the Social Exclusion Unit report, "Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners". [76809]

Mr. Lammy: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, on 24 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 494W.

Salisbury Alcohol and Drug Advisory Service

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are on the waiting list for counselling at Salisbury Alcohol and Drug Advisory Service; and how long they are expected to wait for an appointment. [77314]

Ms Blears: The way in which waiting lists are measured at this service does not allow us to provide a number for those specifically requiring counselling. It is estimated that there are approximately 110 people on the waiting list at the Salisbury Alcohol and Drug Advisory Service (SADAS) for structured counselling and/or other treatment requirements.

Current waiting times reported by SADAS

	Number
Highest priority cases	1 to 2 weeks
Treatment for under 25-year-olds	Up to 8 weeks
Arrest referral	Up to 12 weeks
Low risk	Up to 52 weeks

Note:
It should be noted that the figures above measure the time from referral to treatment, and not from the first appointment, which may have occurred at an earlier date.

Seroxat

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made of the accuracy of labelling and associated information material for the anti-depressant drug Seroxat, with regard to *(a)* side effects and *(b)* difficulty of withdrawal; [76226]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the side effects of the anti-depressant drug Seroxat, including difficulty of withdrawal. [76227]

Ms Blears: Seroxat (paroxetine) is a member of a group of drugs known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Before a product is granted a licence for use in the UK, it must meet appropriate standards of safety, quality and efficacy. After licensing, the safety of all medicines, including SSRIs, is continually monitored by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the independent expert advisory body, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM), and any new evidence that emerges is carefully reviewed.

The MCA/CSM carried out a major review of all side effects associated with SSRIs, which was completed in 2000 and resulted in product information for all SSRIs, including Seroxat, being updated and harmonised to reflect the common safety profiles of these medicines. An article in "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in 2000 informed presenters about this review and reminded them about the risk of withdrawal reactions.

Withdrawal reactions are an important and well-recognised side effect of Seroxat and also occur with the other SSRIs. The MCA/CSM warned prescribers about the possibility of withdrawal reactions associated with Seroxat via an article in the Bulletin, "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in 1993. The CSM re-reviewed the issue of withdrawal reactions and possible dependence with Seroxat and the other SSRIs in 1998–99. From a detailed review of all available data, the CSM concluded that all SSRIs may be associated with withdrawal reactions on stopping, but that on current evidence, they are not associated with dependence. As a result of this review, product information for all SSRIs was updated in relation to withdrawal reactions. This issue was also reviewed at a European level by the Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP), which reached similar conclusions.

The product information for Seroxat, which includes the summary of product characteristics (SPC) for prescribers and the patient information leaflet (PIL), contains full details of side effects and warnings about withdrawal reactions. Doctors are advised to consider gradual tapering of dose when Seroxat is discontinued rather than abruptly stopping to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the drug Seroxat. [76741]

Ms Blears: Seroxat (paroxetine) is a member of a group of drugs known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Before a product is granted a licence for use in the UK, it must meet appropriate standards of safety, quality and efficacy. After licensing, the safety of all medicines, including SSRIs, is continually monitored by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the independent expert advisory body, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM); any new evidence that emerges is carefully reviewed.

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Smoking Rates (Children)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the smoking rates among children in each year since 1990 in *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS region. [75639]

Ms Blears: Information on smoking among young people aged 11 to 15 years is obtained from a series of surveys of school children. Until 1998, these surveys were carried out every two years; since then they have been annual. The available information is shown in the tables.

Prevalence of regular cigarette smoking among secondary school children aged 11 to 15, England, 1990 to 2001

	Regular smokers[1] *(percentages)*	*Base number*
1990	10	3,121
1992	10	3,295
1994	12	3,045
1996	13	2,854
1998	11	4,723
1999	9	9,333
2000	10	7,061
2001	10	9,271

[1] Regular smokers are defined as those who smoke at least one cigarette a week, on average.

Sources:

1. ONS: Smoking, drinking and drug use among young teenagers in 1999.
2. NCSR: Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2000. Available on the internet at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/englandsmoking.pdf
3. NCSR: Drug use, smoking and drinking among young people in England in 2001: Preliminary Results (DH Statistical Press Notice). Available on the internet at http:/www.doh.gov.uk/public/statspntables.htm

Prevalence of regular cigarette smoking among secondary school children aged 11 to 15, by Government Office Region England, 1999 to 2000

	Percentages		
Region	*1999*	*2000*	*Base numbers (for 2000)*
North East	9	8	428
North West/Merseyside	10	11	999
Yorkshire and Humberside	10	9	583
East Midlands	8	11	687
West Midlands	9	11	931
Eastern	10	12	820
London	9	9	571
South East	8	11	1,325
South West	9	9	717
England	9	10	7,061

Notes:

1. The base in 1999 (England) was 9,333.
2. Data not available by NHS region.
3. Data not available by NHS region or Government Office region prior to 1999.
4. Only preliminary results have been published from the 2001 survey: the main report will be published in late 2002.

Sources:

1. ONS: Smoking, drinking and drug use among teenagers in 1999.
2. NCSR: Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in 2000. Available on the internet at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/englandsmoking.pdf

Staffing Levels (Portsmouth Hospitals)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on staffing levels at *(a)* Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth, *(b)* St. Mary's Hospital, Portsmouth and (C) St. James Hospital, Portsmouth. [76506]

Ms Blears: This information is collected centrally at trust level and not by individual hospital site. Information on vacancy rates has been collected in the national health service vacancy survey since 1999. Information, taken from the surveys for 1999 to 2002, has been placed in the Library.

We recognise that the south-east has suffered problems in recruiting and retaining staff. Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust and the local health community continue to work to ensure that vacant posts are filled as soon as possible.

Stem Cell Research

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to support stem cell research to combat disease. [77489]

Ms Blears: The Government believe that the UK is well placed to remain a world leader in stem cell research.

The Government have been working with funding agencies and other research bodies to make stem cell research a priority area for funding. The Medical Research Council (MRC) has taken the lead with other funders in developing a national Stem Cell Initiative.

Outcomes during 2002 include new appointments and research support, the establishment of the national stem cell bank and the organisation of a major stem cell conference that was opened by my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Department for Trade and Industry Lord Sainsbury and attended by 400 delegates from 0 countries, including representatives of 20 companies.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources are being allocated to the setting up of the stem cell bank. [77491]

Ms Blears: The Medical Research Council (MRC) announced details of the new national stem cell bank in September 2002. MRC has awarded a grant to the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC) to establish and run the United Kingdom stem cell bank for an initial period of three years at a total cost of £2.6 million. The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) will contribute 25 per cent., of the set up costs; MRC will manage the grant.

The grant will commence on 1 January 2003 and the funding profile is as follows:

	£000
Year 1	472
Year 2	1,305
Year 3	822
Total	2,599

Additional moneys will be sought for phase two of the bank, specifically relating to increasing capacity for therapeutic purposes.

Stents

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of *(a)* drug coated and *(b)* plain stents; and if he will publish relative success rates. [78580]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 October 2002]*: The Department referred drug coated stents, also called drug eluting stents, to the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) on 20 May this year for appraisal. NICE will produce technology appraisal guidance for the National Health Service on the clinical and cost effectiveness of drug eluting stents and on the appropriate use of this new technology. The Department does not currently collect information on the number of percutaneous coronary interventions that involve the use of stents or the relative success rates of different types of stent.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department has issued to primary care trusts regarding the use of drug coated stents. [78581]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The Department has not issued any guidelines to primary care trusts regarding the use of drug coated stents, also called drug eluting stents. However, the Department referred drug eluting stents to the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) on 20 May this year for appraisal. NICE will produce technology appraisal guidance for the National Health Service on the clinical and cost effectiveness of drug eluting stents and on the appropriate use of this new technology.

Suicide

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have attempted suicide in each of the past five years and have been admitted to hospital as a consequence. [78047]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of people who have attempted suicide in each of the last five years and been admitted to hospital as a consequence is not collected centrally.

The table shows the number of finished consultant episodes in national health service hospitals with a primary diagnosis of injury and poisoning between 1996–97 and 2000–01 England.

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
All completed injury and poisoning episodes	744,870	765,560	747,260	775,130	761,220
No external cause given	110,190	113,620	111,550	114,690	120,500
Percentage of total injury and poisoning	14.8	14.8	14.9	14.8	15.8

Note:
This information is taken from Hospital Episode Statistics system (HES) and relates to in-patients who have finished their hospital episodes under the care of a consultant and have been discharged, transferred to another hospital or consultant specialist or died.

Surgical Procedures (Safeguards)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many surgical procedures have taken place in the private sector in the last six months; and what safeguards are in place to prevent a conflict of interests of those medical staff working in both the private and public sector. [78697]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect information on the number of surgical procedures that take place in the private sector. We expect doctors who work both in private and public sector, like all doctors, to behave in a professional manner. The General Medical Council's ethical guidance Good Medical Practice states that doctors must not put pressure on patients to accept private treatment and must always act in their patients' best interests when making referrals and providing or arranging treatment or care.

Teenage Pregnancy Strategy

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy commenced; how many girls in England and Wales *(a)* under 16 years of age and *(b)* under 18 years of age expressed as a total figure and as a percentage of the total number of girls, in each age range, have been provided with *(i)* contraception and (ii) emergency contraception in schools, pharmacies, family planning clinics and other establishments authorised to provide contraception since the commencement of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. [78003]

Ms Blears: Information is not available in the form requested.

Information about the number of girls under 16 and aged 16–19, and rates per 100 population attending family planning clinics are available in the statistical bulletin "NHS Contraceptive Services, England: 2001/02" copies of which are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0220.htm.

Information for 2002–01 and 1999–2000 is also available in statistical bulletins for the relevant years, copies of which are available in the Library.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many boys in England and Wales *(a)* under 16 years of age and *(b)* under 18 years of age, expressed as a total figure and as a percentage of the total number of boys in each age range, have been provided with contraception in schools, pharmacies, family planning clinics and other establishments authorised to provide contraception since the commencement of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. [78004]

Ms Blears: Information is not available in the form requested.

Information about the total number of males attending family planning clinics and the rate per 100 population, is shown in Table 2 of the statistical bulletin "NHS Contraceptive Services, England: 2001–02". Data is included from 1991–92 to 2001–02 but is not broken down by age. The bulletin is available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0220.htm.

Transfusions

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proportion of patients requiring transfusion plasma who received only virus inactivated products in the past year. [75002]

Ms Blears: No data are collected centrally on the proportion of virally inactivated fresh frozen plasma (FFP) received by patients. In April 2002, the national blood service (NBS) introduced methylene blue treatment of FFP for neonates and children born after 1 January 1996. United Kingdom FFP is already a very safe product. To minimise the risk from viruses, it is made only from previously tested blood donors. The current high levels of safety are achieved by screening out potential high risk donors and then further testing every unit of donated blood for the presence of infections, such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. FFP produced by the NBS, using UK donors, has also been leucodepleted to remove white cells, which evidence suggests may carry the greatest risk of transmitting vdD. A commercially produced, pooled solvent detergent treated FFP is licensed in the UK and available to the National Health Service.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the use of methlyene blue treated fresh frozen plasma in children. [75006]

Ms Blears: Provision of methylene blue (MB) treated fresh frozen plasma for children born after 1 January 1996 is part of a larger strategy to provide single unit, virus inactivated non-United Kingdom plasma for this group. Steps are actively being taken to find a safe, reliable source of plasma from the United States, an area free of BSE. The use of a non-pooled product minimises the risk of spread of pathogens, which may not be susceptible to the pathogen inactivation process. Currently, MB is the only available product for virally inactivating single unit plasma.

This policy will be kept under review by the Government's expert advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues for transplantation.

Tuberculosis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many teenagers in the UK were vaccinated against TB last year. [78188]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Information about the numbers of teenagers receiving BCG vaccinations is contained in table 4 of the statistical bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2001–02". A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library and can also be found on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0218.htm.

Information for Wales, Scotland and Ireland is a matter for the devolved Administrations.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what co-ordination is in place from his Department with the Homelessness Unit at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in combating the rise of TB in the homeless. [78185]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Screening policy for the homeless is determined at local levels; London wide there has been regular screening of homeless people at drop-in centres, and there are studies currently looking at screening homeless people more effectively and efficiently.

United Healthcare Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the agreement between his Department and the United Healthcare Group. [78311]

Mr. Hutton: The government is committed to encouraging expressions of interest from successful international organisations to partner Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in developing and testing models of integrated care in the national health service. In line with this commitment, the Department is in discussion with United Healthcare Group with a view to entering into a contractual relationship with them to provide hands-on support to a number of PCTs to test elements of United Healthcare Group's Evercare model in this country and tailor it to the needs of the NHS. Under the Evercare model, doctors and nurses in primary care work together with care staff to identify vulnerable individuals at highest risk of hospitalisation. This allows for early intervention and treatment, thus avoiding inappropriate hospital admission, and facilitating safe, early discharge where a stay in hospital is necessary. The work will be carried out under the national primary and care trust development programme to promote significant transformational change.

Waiting Lists (Eastbourne)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients at Eastbourne District General Hospital waited longer than *(a)* four and *(b)* 24 hours in accident and emergency in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion they were of the total. [78699]

Ms Blears: Eastbourne Hospitals National Health Service Trust merged with Hastings and Rother NHS Trust in April 2002 to form East Sussex NHS Trust. Data are collected by NHS trust and not by individual hospital site. Therefore data are presented for Eastbourne Hospitals Trust up to March 2002. From April to September 2002, the data are for East Sussex NHS Trust as a whole.

The number of patients spending over four hours in accident and emergency (A&E), from arrival to departure, for each month in the last year is shown in the table.

Month	Patients spending over four hours in A&E	Total A&E attendances	Percentage of total
September 2001	472	3,176	14.9
October 2001	533	3,889	13.7
November 2001	484	3,124	15.5
December 2001	645	3,708	17.4
January 2002	506	2,810	18.0
February 2002	464	2,810	16.5
March 2002	511	3,080	16.6
April 2002	1,060	6,371	16.6
May 2002	1,400	8,394	16.7
June 2002	1,051	6,876	15.3
July 2002	1,560	8,976	17.4
August 2002	1,233	7,376	16.7
September 2002	1,298	6,005	21.6

These data are taken from management information provided by the trusts and have not been validated by the Department.

Information is not collected centrally on the number of patients spending over 24 hours in A&E. Information is collected on the number of patients waiting over 12 hours for admission via A&E, the time from the clinician's decision to admit until the patient is admitted to an in-patient ward. Eastbourne District General Hospital, now part of East Sussex NHS Trust, has not reported any of these in the past 12 months.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1)what assessment he has made of the impact on medical staffing rotas of extending the Working Time Directive to junior doctors; and if he will make a statement. [77504]

(2) what pilot studies are being undertaken in NHS hospitals to demonstrate innovative ways of complying with the requirements of the Working Time Directive. [77506]

Mr. Hutton: From August 2004, junior doctors will come within the remit of the European Working Time Directive. The key aspect is that junior doctors must have 11 hours rest in every 24 hours.

It will not be possible for the National Health Service to achieve European Working Time Directive compliance by applying a single "one size fits all" model across the whole country. Instead, compliance will be achieved with a portfolio of action at local and national level.

Individual NHS trusts will need to look critically at working patterns and whether it is necessary for doctors to be resident. Where the intensity of calls requires resident cover, it will generally be necessary to move to new patterns of working such as shifts or partial shifts.

The Department will be issuing guidance on implementation this Autumn and is working with stakeholders including the medical Royal Colleges, British Medical Association, NHS Confederation and the service to ensure that effective solutions are developed.

The Department is therefore funding a programme of pilot projects based in NHS trusts to develop and test innovative solutions to European Working Time Directive implementation. We are funding about 20 pilot studies in individual NHS trusts and groups of NHS trusts on innovative ways of delivering services while complying with the requirements of the post-2004 Working Time Directive legislation. The individual pilots will cover areas such as night teams, health care practitioners, nurse practitioners and whole systems service redesign.

Full details of the pilot programme will be announced shortly and will be available on the Department's website www.doh.qov.uk/workinqtime/.

Workplace Nurseries

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of NHS facilities have workplace nurseries attached. [77996]

Mr. Hutton: A national survey of national health service child care provision, undertaken early in 2001, found that 114 NHS trusts provided nursery facilities for their staff. Since April 2001, a further 117 schemes for new or extensions to existing nurseries have had capital funding agreed as part of the NHS child care strategy. As a criterion of funding these nurseries should, wherever possible, provide places for the use of all health care workers, including those at other NHS organisations.

Further capital funding will be made available in 2003–04 to meet the NHS plan target of 150 new nursery schemes by March 2004. All new build hospitals must also include a nursery in their plans.

Obesity

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of sick days taken in each of the last five years for which figures are available as a result of illness arising from overweight and obesity; and what his strategy is for addressing this problem. [74459]

Ms Blears: The National Audit Office report, "Tackling Obesity in England, published February 2001", estimated that in 1998 overweight and obesity contributed to 18 million sick days. The Government are committed to tackling the rising trend in obesity. The National Health Service priorities and planning framework for 2003–2006 includes targets on reducing coronary heart disease (CHD). One of these targets requires practice-based registers and systematic treatment regimes, including appropriate advice on diet, physical activity and smoking; it also covers the majority of patients at high risk of CHD, particularly those with hypertension, diabetes and a body mass index greater than 30. The Department is working with a range of partners at national, regional and local levels, on programmes to improve diet and increase physical activity levels. Action to improve diet includes a Five-a-day programme, including initiatives with the food industry, including manufacturers and caterers, improving the overall balance of diet—working with the Food Standards Agency—and a food in schools and healthy schools programme. Plans were recently

announced to transform physical education and school sport and club links over the next three years. There is investment to develop local exercise action pilots, led by primary care trusts, and the new opportunities fund is supporting the delivery of a physical education and sports programme.

Weight Management

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is given on the database of weight management services developed by his Department; and how many times it has been updated since it was created. [74460]

Ms Blears: The database of weight management services was completed in 1997 and made available at National Health Service regional offices for local dissemination on request. The project had two aims, one of which was to identify existing projects on weight management in the regions and to compile a directory of services. The database is a directory of weight management services in England, but does not claim to be comprehensive. Entries are arranged by region and, within each region, alphabetically by town. Each entry has details of project name, funding organisation, contact name and details and information on the services the project offers and if the project has been evaluated. The information has not been updated since publication.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 6 November 2002

DEFENCE

Army

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many members of the Army indicated when last questioned that they have been a victim of *(a)* harassment, *(b)* discrimination and *(c)* bullying in the Army; what percentage of those responding this represents; what percentage of actual strength this represents; and if he will make a statement. [78635]

Mr. Ingram: In response to the latest Army Continuous Attitude Survey, those members of the Army that indicated they had been the victim of harassment, discrimination and bullying in the last 12 months are shown in the table.

Question	*Number of Army Personnel who alleged:*	*Percentage of Respondents*	*Percentage of those Surveyed*
Racial Discrimination	42	2.0	1.0
Racial Harassment	36	1.8	0.9
Sex Discrimination	64	3.1	1.6
Sexual Harassment	33	1.6	0.8
Bullying	110	5.4	2.8

The latest survey was undertaken in March–April 2002 and sent to a 4 per cent. random sample of the trained Army (excluding Gurkhas and Full Time Reserve Service personnel); 3,978 questionnaires were sent out and 2,037 were returned.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of army recruits (i) went absent without leave and (ii) left the Army within the first six *(A)* weeks and *(B)* months of training in the last year for which figures are available. [79717]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many members of the Army indicated when last questioned the preference that unmarried partners should be granted the same support and allowances as the spouses of officers and soldiers; what percentage of those responding this represents; what percentage of actual strength this represents; and if he will make a statement. [78639]

Mr. Ingram: In response to the latest Army Continuous Attitude Survey, 842 members of the Army indicated they believed that partners should have the same support and allowances as the spouses of married officers and soldiers. This represents some 41 per cent. of those who responded and 21 per cent. of those surveyed.

The latest survey was undertaken in March–April 2002 and sent to a 4 per cent. random sample of the trained Army (excluding Gurkhas and Full Time Reserve Service); 3,978 questionnaires were sent out and 2,037 were returned.

Army Equipment

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what estimates his Department has made of how much, on average, individual members of the Army spent on purchasing additional or replacement clothing and equipment to supplement standard issue kit over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [78637]

Mr. Ingram: None. Service personnel are provided with all the equipment they require to do their jobs. The clothing and equipment with which they are issued is designed to be fit for purpose in a range of circumstances.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many members of the forces have indicated that they *(a)* have and *(b)* have not purchased additional replacement (i) clothing and (ii) equipment supplementing kit issued by the Army in the last 12 months; what percentage of actual strength this represents in each case; and if he will make a statement. [78636]

Mr. Ingram: In response to the latest Army Continuous Attitude Survey, 1,037 individuals indicated that they had purchased some item of equipment or clothing in the last 12 months. This represents some 26 per cent. of those surveyed. Seventy four per cent. of individuals indicated that they had not. The survey does not ask the individual to make the distinction between clothing or equipment, and purchases may include items which are not issued by the Army. The survey was administered to a 4 per cent. random sample of the trained Army (excluding Gurkhas and Full Time Reserve Service personnel); 3,978 questionnaires were sent out.

Operation Sandcastle

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the cost was of Operation Sandcastle. [79549]

Mr. Ingram: We estimate that the cost of Operation Sandcastle was around £364,000 at 1991–1992 prices.

No-fly Zones

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what offensive operations were conducted by the Royal Air Force against military installations in Iraq on *(a)* 21 September 1999, *(b)* 21 September 2000, *(c)* 21 September 2001, *(d)* 20 September 2002 and *(e)* 22 September 2002. [79159]

Mr. Ingram: RAF and other coalition aircraft conducting legitimate patrols of the No-Fly Zones over Iraq are regularly threatened by Iraqi air defences. When this occurs they may respond in self-defence, against air defence sites.

On 21 September 1999 and 21 September 2001 RAF aircraft responded against, respectively, air defence radars and a surface-to-air missile site in southern Iraq, using laser-guided bombs.

No responses took place on 21 September 2000, or 20, 21 or 22 September this year.

Apache Helicopter

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for what reasons the organisations training pilots for the Apache helicopter have experienced delays in providing equipment and facilities; [79580]

(2) if the private organisations training pilots for the Apache helicopter will be removed from the project; [79582]

(3) if he will make a statement on the delay in training pilots for the Apache attack helicopter; [79578]

(4) what measure he is taking to ensure that the timetable for training pilots for the Apache helicopter is brought forward; [79583]

(5) for what reasons the organisations involved have been unable to meet deadlines set for the training of pilots for the Apache attack helicopter; [79579]

(6) what penalties were written into the contract for late delivery of equipment and training of pilots for the Apache helicopter. [79581]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many animals covered by the Sixth Report of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee were bred, for the period in question, for possible use in procedures but subsequently *(a)* destroyed and *(b)* passed on to other bodies without so being used. [79048]

Dr. Moonie: The sixth report of the Independent Animal Welfare Committee covers the period from 31 October 2000 to 28 February 2002. Animal figures are compiled on the basis of the calendar year. In 2001 Dstl Porton Down bred two different types of rodents and two types of non-human primates. Of these, 21 mice and six rats were humanely destroyed without use. 916 mice, 2,624 rats and 10 rhesus macaques were issued dead to other organisations.

TREASURY

Split Capital Investment Trusts

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, what representations his Department has received regarding a compensation package for investors who have lost money due to market abuses relating to split capital investment trusts. [79106]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers receive a wide range of correspondence relating to financial service matters.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, what representations his Department has received regarding the optimum level for landfill tax. [79098]

John Healey: Treasury Ministers have received a variety of representations about the rate of landfill tax.

Charities (Tax Relief)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much has been contributed annually to the charitable sector (a) overall and (b) through the Gift Aid scheme, since the scheme's introduction; what these sums are as proportions of the total turnover of the charitable sector; and what the total cost is to his Department of the tax refunds resulting from the Gift Aid scheme. [79111]

John Healey: Figures on Gift Aid are published in the income tax section of Inland Revenue Statistics at: www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/index.htm. Consistent and reliable estimates for total donations to charities are not available centrally, nor are figures on turnover. However, a survey by NCVO/NOP estimates that the value of individual donations was £6.8 billion in 2001. In addition charities benefit from donations from companies. The Charity Commission shows that at the end of the second quarter of 2002 the annual income of registered charities in England and Wales was £28.5 billion.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the amount of tax forgone as a result of tax allowances granted to charities in England and Wales in *(a)* the last financial year and *(b)* each of the previous six financial years; [79135]

(2) what the total amount of tax relief for charities has been since 1997; and how much was relief on *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax, *(c)* capital gains tax, *(d)* inheritance tax and *(e)* stamp duty. [79092]

John Healey: The available estimates, which relate to the United Kingdom, for the total cost of tax forgone are about £2 billion in each of the last six financial years. This includes income tax, inheritance tax, business rates and VAT. Figures for the first two categories were published in various issues of the FSBR and in Table 1.5 of Inland Revenue Statistics at: www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/index.htm. These figures will be updated in the Tax Ready Reckoner published at the time of the Chancellor's Press Budget Report. Estimates for relief on corporation tax, capital gains tax and stamp duty are not available.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has for the Payroll Giving scheme providing tax relief for charitable donations; and if he will make a statement. [79093]

John Healey: In April 2000, the Government abolished the maximum amounts that could be given under Payroll Giving. To boost the scheme, the Government announced a three-year publicity campaign to promote the scheme to more employers and their employees and a 10 per cent. supplement on all Payroll Giving donations until April 2003. The cost of the supplement is met from public expenditure. The amount given under Payroll Giving has increased from £29 million in 1998–99 to about £70 million in 2001–02.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the level of charitable donations since the abolition

of the minimum limit on donations through the *(a)* Payroll Giving scheme and *(b)* Gift Aid scheme. [79110]

John Healey: In April 2000, the Government set a target to raise the amount given through Payroll Giving to £60 million by April 2003. The total given in the year 2001–02 was around £73m. In 2001–02 nearly £450m was repaid to charities under Gift Aid. The Government looks forward to the continuing success of both schemes.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to prevent suspended shares being given as part of the Gift Aid scheme. [79104]

John Healey: The Gift Aid scheme only covers gifts of money. The relief for giving listed shares, introduced in April 2000, allows individuals and companies to deduct the market value of gifts of listed shares from their income or corporation tax calculation. Where shares are being actively traded, the value will normally be easily ascertained by reference to published prices. However, where trading is suspended, the value will be the price which might have been paid in a transaction at arm's length. Any relief would therefore reflect the suspension of trading in the shares. The shares would still, of course, be of value to the charity, when trading resumed.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the Gift Aid scheme tax relief for charitable donations; and if he will make a statement. [79094]

John Healey: In April 2000, the Government abolished the minimum donation of £250, so that every donation, no matter how large or small, can come within the Gift Aid scheme, providing the donor meets the scheme's conditions. From April 2003, donors will be able to carry back Gift Aid donations made before they make their self assessment tax returns into the previous tax year, thereby obtaining any higher rate relief earlier. From April 2004 taxpayers will be able to nominate a charity to receive part or all of a tax repayment that is due to them.

The Government continue to support The Giving Campaign, a charity sector-led body, which has done a great deal to raise awareness of the Gift Aid scheme among both charities and donors.

Pool Re'

Mr. Flight: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to introduce the necessary legislation regarding Pool Re' insurance cover to include the Government's new wider definition of terrorism. [79017]

Ruth Kelly: We currently have no plans to amend the definition of acts of terrorism in the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993. We are not persuaded that there is an issue of sufficient substance to justify primary legislation.

Mr. Flight: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make a statement on the Government's discussions with the commercial insurance sector regarding commercial cover being available in respect of the substantial area not covered by Pool Re' where presently commercial exclusion is absolute; and if he will make a statement. [79016]

Ruth Kelly: The availability of terrorism cover in the commercial market is a matter that we have and will continue to discuss with the insurance industry. We are not persuaded that there is an issue of sufficient substance to justify primary legislation to amend the definition of acts of terrorism in the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993.

Death Benefits

James Purnell: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate what the annual cost would be of in-service death benefits extended to unmarried partners, in accordance with the rules for the new Civil Service Pension, for the financial year 2003–04, and each of the five subsequent years at 2003–04, prices for *(a)* the whole of the public sector, *(b)* the Teachers' Pension Scheme, *(c)* the NHS Pension Scheme, *(d)* the Local Government Pension Scheme, *(e)* the Firemen's Pension Scheme, *(f)* the Police Pension Scheme and *(g)* the Armed Forces Pension Scheme; [78857]

(2) if he will estimate what the costs would be for the future service of current members if in-service death benefits were extended to unmarried partners, in accordance with the rules for the new Civil Service Pension, at 2003–04 prices for *(a)* the whole of the public sector, *(b)* the Teachers' Pension Scheme, *(c)* the NHS Pension Scheme, *(d)* the Local Government Scheme, *(e)* the Firemen's Pension Scheme, *(f)* the Police Pension Scheme and *(g)* the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. [78858]

Ruth Kelly: There is no cost to the Exchequer from the introduction on 1 October 2002 of new pension arrangements for the Civil Service. Members participating in those arrangements will meet the full costs of all the benefit improvements, including the introduction of survivor pensions for unmarried partners, through higher employee contributions.

Our policy is that public service pension schemes may introduce unmarried partner pensions only if members want the change and are prepared to pay for it through higher member contributions or a rebalancing of other benefits which is cost neutral overall to employers and the taxpayer. Death lump sum benefits may be provided, however, to unmarried partners in schemes where members are able to nominate the recipient.

European Union

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, what Britain's net contribution to the European Union was *(a)* in the last year and *(b)* excluding the budget rebate. [79097]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the United Kingdom's net contribution in 2001–02, and the abatement included within it, can be found at Table 3.1 (page 12) of the 2001 European Community Finances White Paper (Cm 5547). Equivalent figures for calendar year 2001 can be found at Table 3 (page 40) of the same publication.

Drug-related Deaths

Lynne Jones: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer to parliamentary question 76983, if he will provide separate figures for deaths caused by *(a)* crack cocaine and *(c)* cocaine in each of the last five years. [79384]

Ruth Kelly: The answer requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Lynne Jones, dated 6 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question asking for separate figures for deaths caused by *(a)* crack cocaine and *(b)* cocaine in each of the last five years.

It is not possible to provide separate figures on deaths related to crack cocaine and cocaine from routine mortality data, as these substances are not generally separately identified on death certificates.

The Office for National Statistics routinely publishes a combined figure for deaths mentioning cocaine on the death certificate. It is not possible, in cases where more than one substance is mentioned on the death certificate, to state which was primarily responsible for the death.

Money Laundering

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent research his Department has commissioned into money laundering in the UK; and if he will publish the results of this research. [79102]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury is preparing a strategy document to explain the objectives and key criteria of the UK's anti-money laundering regime, and assess the extent to which current measures meet our overarching objectives. This will be finalised after discussions in the Money Laundering Advisory Committee and will then be published on the Treasury website.

Public Service Agreement

Mr. Flight: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures his Department has in place to monitor other Government Departments' performance in relation to their agreed public service agreement. [79077]

Mr. Boateng: Departments provide regular information about their performance to the Treasury. Departments will shortly publish progress in their Autumn Performance Reports, and the Government will introduce regular web-based reporting of progress against all the PSA targets announced in the 2002 Spending Review.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what strategies his Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79293]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury is committed to age diversity and has implemented the recommendations of the Government's "Winning the Generation Game" report.

Equality of opportunity for all staff is a key feature of all civil service employment. As part of this, ageism is not tolerated.

Recruitment, development, performance management and retention policies are continuously reviewed. There are no age barriers to employment and retirement age is determined on business needs only. The Treasury has no upper age limit for any of its recruitment schemes, other than the retirement age, which is currently 60. The recruitment literature states,

"we recruit and promote strictly on ability and performance. We welcome applications from all qualified individuals. We do not discriminate on grounds of gender, marital status, race, colour, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, community background or age subject to our policy that all staff retire at 60."

Mr. Jenkins: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of new recruits to his Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79306]

Ruth Kelly: The information for HM Treasury is shown in the following table:

Year	*Percentage of New Recruits Aged 50 and Over*
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	2.2
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	1.6

Asbestor-based Liability Claims

Mr. Flight: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions he has made regarding the costs of asbestos-based liability claims against Her Majesty's Government over the next 20 years. [79018]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury makes no assumption about the costs of asbestos liability claims. It is for individual Departments to make provision in their accounts for any liabilities against them. Details of a Department's provisions and possible contingent liabilities can be found in the notes to their Resource Accounts in the line with UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (UKGAAP)

British Energy

Mr. Flight: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what recent meetings his Department has had with the Department of Trade and Industry regarding a merger of British Energy with BNFL; and if he will place the minutes in the Library; [79014]

(2) what recent meetings his Department has had with the Department of Trade and Industry regarding British Energy; and if he will place the minutes in the Library; [79013]

(3) what recent meetings his Department has had with *(a)* the Finance Director and *(b)* the former Chief Executive of British Energy; and if he will place the minutes in the Library. [79015]

John Healey: I refer to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, c.114–15. In line with previous Administrations, it is not this Government's practice to provide details of the meetings they routinely have with a wide range of organisations.

Mr. Flight: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations his Department has received from British Energy requesting exclusion from the Climate Change Levy; and if he will place in the Library the minutes of meetings with British Energy on this subject. [79019]

John Healey: Treasury Ministers have received numerous representations on the climate change levy. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, c. 114–15, in line with previous Administrations, it is not this Government's practice to provide details of the meetings they routinely have with a wide range of organisations.

With regard to nuclear power, the Government made it clear when the detail of the levy was announced in the November 1999 PBR that electricity from nuclear power would be subject to the levy. The Government have restated since then that there are no plans to exempt nuclear energy from the levy, which is designed to encourage energy efficiency across the business and public sectors and to increase the use of sustainable forms of energy.

Thalidomide Trust

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much money the Government have paid into the Thalidomide Trust since 1973; how much tax the Government have collected from payments from the Thalidomide Trust to thalidomide victims; what tax rate is applied to payments to thalidomide victims from the Thalidomide Trust; and if he will estimate the uptake of tax reclaim under the previous fiscal system by thalidomide victims who pay tax on money from the Thalidomide Trust. [79354]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The Government paid £5m into the Thalidomide trust in 1974, £800,000 in 1978, and £7m in 1996. Taxpayer confidentiality prevents the disclosure of specific details on how much tax the Government has collected from payments from the Thalidomide trust to thalidomide victims. As with other discretionary trusts, the trustees account for tax at 34 per cent. on the income they pay out. The beneficiaries are then subject to tax on this income in the normal way, and they may claim credit for the tax paid by the trustees. This tax treatment has not changed so it is not possible to estimate the uptake of tax reclaim under a previous fiscal system. Information on the numbers of thalidomide victims claiming tax repayment is not available.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent meetings have been held between the Treasury and Thalidomide Action Group UK on the tax status of beneficiary payments from the Thalidomide Trust. [79356]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The Chancellor has not held any meetings recently with the Thalidomide Action Group UK on the tax status of beneficiary payments from the Thalidomide Trust.

Pete Wishart: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much direct compensation the Government have paid to thalidomide victims since 1972. [79355]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have provided thalidomide victims with support from health and social services. In addition thalidomide victims benefit from payments from the Thalidomide Trust.

Departmental Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent in recruiting staff to his Department in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south east in each year since 1997. [78561]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The costs of recruiting staff fall largely to individual teams, and are charged to team budgets. Therefore information on the total cost of recruiting staff is not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Enterprise Zones

Albert Owen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Chancellor has to introduce Enterprise Zones in deprived areas of England and Wales. [79520]

Mr. Healey *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* The Government have designated 2000 Enterprise Areas across the UK, comprising the most deprived wards in the country. In England these are the most deprived 15 per cent. of wards, and in Wales the most deprived 42 per cent. The Enterprise Areas already qualify for stamp duty relief on all transactions up to £150,000, and the Government will remove stamp duty for all non-residential transactions subject to State Aids approval. Businesses in Enterprise Areas are also eligible for other forms of assistance such as the Community Investment Tax Credit and the Phoenix Fund, and at the Pre-Budget Report the Government will publish details of further plans to boost awareness and take-up of these measures.

Working Families Tax Credit (Scotland)

John Thurso: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of how many families in Scotland are eligible to receive the working families tax credit. [79740]

Dawn Primarolo: No such estimate is available.

Mapeley Steps Ltd.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers of his answers of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 213W, on estate sales, when Parliament was informed of the sales to Mapeley Steps Ltd; and whether the Watch House (Customs House), Cowes, has been sold. [78292]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise issued a joint press release "Strategic Transfer of the Estate to the Private Sector (Steps)" (jw 4/01) on 9 March 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. This press release mistakenly stated that the transfer was made to Mapeley Ltd. The transfers were in fact made to Mapeley Steps Ltd and this has been corrected in subsequent press statements.

The Watch Tower, Cowes was sold to Mapeley Steps Ltd as part of the Steps arrangements.

Cash Plan Providers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1), what revenue he estimates would be generated by the taxation of the trading surpluses of non-profit distribution health cash plan providers; [78496]

(2) what recent representations he has received concerning proposed changes in the tax treatment of trading surpluses generated by non-profit health cash plan providers; what assessment he has made of the implications of the proposed changes for the level of voluntary donations made by this sector to the National Health Service and other health charities; and how many *(a)* non-profit health cash providers and *(b)* plan holders he anticipates will be affected; [78494]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact of the taxation of the trading surpluses of non-profit distributing health cash plan providers on the level of donations made by such bodies to the NHS and medical charities. [78495]

Ruth Kelly: Ministers have received a number of letters about the tax treatment of health cash plan providers. Providers who are not trading on a mutual basis are able to make rule changes necessary to comply with the requirements that exempt them from tax. There is no retrospective tax charge. No information is available on the impact of these changes, or the revenue generated as these depend largely on decisions taken by individual providers.

Savings Gateway

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make a statement on the four Savings Gateway pilots. [78327]

Ruth Kelly: Pilots for the Savings Gateway were launched in August 2002. The Government will provide a statement on the progress of the pilots in the Pre-budget report.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many full-time equivalent staff there were in the Treasury's departments in each of the last five years. [78412]

Ruth Kelly: The information on total employment (full-time equivalent) in the HM Treasury as at 1 April in each of the last five years is shown in the table:

Table Showing Total Staff as at 1 April for Years 1997–2002

Date	*Total Staff Full-time equivalent*
1 April 2002	1060
1 April 2001	875
1 April 2000	870
1 April 1999	926
1 April 1998	893
1 April 1997	888

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the success of the pilots for the Savings Gateway. [79396]

Ruth Kelly: Pilots for the Savings Gateway were launched in August 2002 and will last for two and a half years including evaluation. The Government will provide a statement on the progress of the pilots in the Pre-budget Report.

Ministers (Tax)

David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the taxable benefits from accommodation for Cabinet Ministers; [78643]

(2) if he will list benefits in kind to Ministers that are *(a)* tax exempt and *(b)* not tax exempt; [78641]

(3) what the maximum tax liability is for each benefit in kind to Ministers; [78640]

(4) if the Government will initiate a review of benefits in kind to Ministers and their taxable status. [78642]

Ruth Kelly: Government Ministers occupying official residences provided by reason of their office meet the statutory conditions for exemption from the tax charge on living accommodation. Where exemption applies and associated services, such as heating, lighting, cleaning, decoration, are supplied as well there is a tax charge of 10 per cent. of the individual's net emoluments from the employment or office. These are the rules applying to all taxpayers.

Ministers of the Crown, along with the Speaker and Opposition office-holders, are exempt, under Section 200AA of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act, from tax on transport or subsistence benefits provided for them or their families; otherwise the benefits tax rules are the same for Ministers as for other taxpayers. There is no statutory maximum on the amount of benefits that can be provided for and taxed on an employee or office-holder.

The Government have no plans to review the tax treatment of benefits in kind provided to Ministers.

Penrose Inquiry

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many requests by Lord Penrose's inquiry for the production of documents he has declined; and on what grounds they were denied; [78830]

(2) what steps have been taken to ensure that information in the possession of the Treasury of relevance to Lord Penrose's inquiry but not specifically requested by him is made available to him; what steps have been taken to identify such information; and how much such information has been supplied to the inquiry; [78826]

(3) what guidance he has given to his officials regarding their co-operation with the inquiry by Lord Penrose into Equitable Life; [78839]

(4) if he will list the requests for information from Lord Penrose's inquiry with which he has yet to comply; and when the request was made in each case; [78831]

(5) what request for papers and other sources of evidence and information the inquiry by Lord Penrose has made to Her Majesty's Treasury; on what date each request was received; and when each was complied with; [78827]

(6) what procedures are in place in his Department for responding to *(a)* correspondence and *(b)* requests for information from the Penrose Inquiry; and if he will publish these procedures; [78829]

(7) if he will list the documents and other evidence provided by Her Majesty's Treasury to the inquiry into Equitable Life by Lord Penrose. [78828]

Ruth Kelly: It was made clear at the outset of the Inquiry that the Treasury would co-operate fully with Lord Penrose. We have done so and all relevant officials are aware of this requirement.

The Treasury has sought to provide all relevant information to the Inquiry, including information not specifically requested.

The Inquiry has made a wide range of requests for documents and information and Treasury officials have co-operated fully in identifying and supplying the requested documents where they have been in the possession of the Treasury. No record of individual requests has been maintained, nor have specific procedures been put in place for dealing with such requests. No requests for the production of documents have been declined and we are not aware of any outstanding requests for information with which we have not yet complied.

Savings (Low Incomes)

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what role he plans for the Friendly Society Movement in increasing savings for those on low incomes. [79393]

Ruth Kelly: Friendly societies have an important role, in competition with other service providers, in providing access to savings products. The Government are committed to encouraging a stronger saving habit in people from low-income groups. That is why we are introducing the Saving Gateway and the Child Trust Fund. Both measures will help develop a stronger saving habit, which should benefit friendly societies. The friendly society movement has played an important role in the establishment of the Child Trust Fund by providing advice and expertise.

Financial Education

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the strategy for a national financial advice network; and if this will include the contribution made by *(a)* credit unions and *(b)* friendly societies in providing advice to the financially excluded. [79399]

Ruth Kelly: It is important that everyone should have access to appropriate financial education, information and generic advice to understand his or her options, as well as having access to regulated product specific advice where appropriate.

There have been proposals for a new network to provide financial education, information and generic advice, and we have noted those proposals with interest. Many organisations are already involved in the provision of those forms of help.

All financial services firms can already support the provision of help for the financially excluded.

The Credit Unions Act 1979 sets out the objects of a credit union, which include the training and education of members in the wise use of money and in the management of their financial affairs. The Government support credit unions welcome contribution to tackling financial exclusion.

Financial Products

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the contribution tax free financial products make to the quality of life for the less affluent; and if he will make a statement. [79398]

Ruth Kelly: The Government recognise the importance of savings in providing people with security if things go wrong, independence throughout their lives and comfort in old age. The Government's strategy is to create the right environment for saving, create the right incentives for people to save and ensure that individuals have the information and financial literacy they need to make the right saving choices.

The Government have already introduced successful products such as Individual Savings Accounts (designed to encourage saving among individuals, particularly those with little or no savings) and Stakeholder pensions (which have extended the benefits of pension saving to previously excluded groups). In addition, pilots for the Saving Gateway were launched in August 2002 and further proposals are being developed for the Child Trust Fund. Statements on the progress of the Government's saving policies will be provided in the Pre Budget Report.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the likelihood of less affluent consumers buying financial products without face to face advice. [79397]

Ruth Kelly: Many financial products (for example insurance, and cash savings) are widely bought without face-to-face advice.

Generally, more sophisticated consumers are more likely to buy investments without face-to-face advice.

But, while sales of retail investments without face-to-face advice have grown, the bulk of sales generally continue to be through advisers who will have met their client. However, as the Sandler Review of "Medium and Long Term Retail Savings in the UK" found, distributors have strong incentives to focus on higher income consumers. The Sandler Review therefore recommended building on existing product standards through the introduction of "stakeholder" products that could significantly help less affluent consumers by providing them with simple, good value, and risk-controlled products that could be sold face to face but without the time and cost associated with regulated advice.

Sandler Review

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what progress has been made with the Sandler Review. [79400]

Ruth Kelly: Ron Sandler's report was wide-ranging and contained recommendations for Government and the regulator, as well as for the retail savings industry. The Treasury is planning to consult on the Sandler recommendation for a suite of regulated products early in the new year. The consideration of Sandler's tax recommendations are being taken forward as part of the normal budget process. The FSA is considering the recommendations that touch on its responsibilities.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many of the recommendations of PAT14 have been achieved. [79395]

Ruth Kelly: Details of progress against specific recommendations of PAT14 were set out in the *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Policy Action Team Audit* report, published in January 2001. Although most proposed actions that were listed have been completed, the report recognised that the work to eliminate financial exclusion is on-going. While we have made important progress across the areas identified by PAT14—credit unions, banking and insurance services, financial education and ethnic minority issues—we need to continue to work with the financial services industry, voluntary and community groups to end financial exclusion.

Credit Unions

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what his Department has done to support *(a)* credit unions and *(b)* friendly societies since 1997. [79394]

Ruth Kelly: The Government welcome the contribution of the mutual sector, including credit unions and friendly societies, to increasing choice and widening access in financial services.

Following the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, the Financial Services Authority has assumed responsibility for the regulation of credit unions and friendly societies. The Act also introduced an independent ombudsman scheme and single financial services compensation scheme. These measures should increase confidence in those considering membership of either credit unions or friendly societies.

We are in the process of delivering a programme of deregulatory measures with the aim of increasing the operational flexibility of credit unions. For example, four measures were introduced in July this year, including enhancement to credit unions' ability to borrow from external sources and more flexibility in the way credit unions can pay dividends to members.

Measures such as the introduction of the Saving Gateway and the Child Trust Fund are intended to encourage saving by low-income groups, which should benefit credit unions and friendly societies.

Inflation

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 65W, on inflation, if he will estimate the cost of measuring such differences; and if he will make a statement. [79516]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter to Mr. Matthew Taylor from Len Cook, dated 6 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning an estimate of the cost of measuring inflation rates between regions.

The development of regional inflation measures would require a major expansion of existing data collections and a substantial development programme to resolve a number of conceptual and technical issues. This would involve significant additional expenditure involving many millions of pounds.

There are several reasons why the current available data is not suitable for the compilation of reliable regional indices. The selection of locations is not designed to be representative of individual regions; the locations would have to be resampled, increased in number, and substantially more prices collected. In addition, many of the centrally compiled indices (e.g. housing, cars, PCs) are designed as national indices; the possibility of developing these to produce regional indices would need to be investigated.

The data used for the weights (such as the Expenditure and Food Survey) would also have to be significantly enhanced to ensure that detailed regional expenditure categories (by type of good or service, and by type of outlet) were being weighted appropriately and represented in the sample of prices being collected. Finally, there will be a significant cost arising from the development of computer systems to produce regional indices.

The conceptual issues to be resolved include whether the items to be priced should be representative of national or regional baskets (different users will have different needs), and also the treatment of regional boundaries. Households do not necessarily restrict their shopping to the region where they live; they may physically cross regional borders for shopping or do so via Internet or mail order shopping.

FSA

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to encourage easier access to professional indemnity insurance for the Financial Services Authority in response to the recent recommendations from the FSA. [79710]

Ruth Kelly: Regulatory requirements relating to professional indemnity insurance are a matter for the Financial Services Authority, which is the single statutory regulator for the UK financial services industry.

In a press statement on 29 October 2002, the FSA announced technical changes to its rulebook regarding professional indemnity insurance.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the number of higher rate tax payers resident in each parliamentary constituency in the last 12 months. [79860]

Dawn Primarolo: A reliable estimate could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Chartered Jets

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much was spent by the Government in each year since 1997–98 on chartering business jets as a result of the RAF's jets in 32 (The Royal) Squadron being unavailable or unsuitable. [79463]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1999, the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The list makes clear where private charter or RAF aircraft have been used. The Government have also published on an annual basis the overall cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. The costs include all Ministers' visits overseas undertaken by private charter or RAF aircraft. Copies of the lists and costs for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2002 are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Information in respect of travel by Ministers within the UK is not held centrally. However, the use of private charter jets within the UK would be expected to be exceptional.

Mr. Love: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what evaluation he has made on extending the discretion to local authorities to charge the full rate of Council Tax on empty properties; and if he will make a statement. [77106]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

An analysis of the responses to the consultation exercise is already available in the Library of the House and on the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. I hope to be able to announce our decisions on the way forward shortly.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects of measures to allow sports clubs to claim council tax relief through becoming registered charities; and if he plans to amend these regulations. [79110]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Sports clubs will normally be liable for national non-domestic rates.

The Charity Commission announced new rules allowing sports clubs to qualify for charity status in November 2001 and now recognise as charitable purposes certain sports related activities. Mandatory rate relief at 80 per cent. of the rates bill is available for all premises used wholly or mainly for charitable purposes. However, no assessment of the number of sports clubs that qualify for mandatory rate relief is available.

Non-profit making sports clubs that are not registered charities can receive discretionary relief from their local authorities. Sports clubs will also benefit from our proposals for small business relief included in the draft Local Government Bill.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits Agency

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on his plans for the jobcentres and benefits offices in the Forest of Dean; and what steps he will take to ensure that there will be sufficient resources to guarantee the effectiveness of jobcentre plus and the Pension Service in the Forest of Dean; [77113]

(2) what plans he has to close existing offices of the Benefits Agency and jobcentres in the Forest of Dean. [77116]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are currently taking forward one of the largest organisational changes in the history of the civil service. We are integrating the whole of the old Employment Service and the Benefit Agency's services for people of working age to form Jobcentre Plus whilst simultaneously launching the new Pension Service.

A key aim of the programme is to improve access to services providing active work-focused help to people of working age through Jobcentre Plus and an expert pensions advice service through The Pension Service. We are currently reviewing the facilities available to us to provide these services across the country. We are looking to make the most efficient use of these facilities whilst maintaining a high standard of service to all our customers. Both agencies are extending access to their services with, for example, the innovative use of new technology, the use of contact centres staffed by expert advisers, the extension of face-to-face services into communities and the sharing of facilities with our local partners such as local authorities.

In spring 2003 Bath Pension Centre is scheduled to take over benefit processing and the telephone advice service for the Gloucestershire area. Pensioners will still be able to meet an adviser face to face at local advice surgeries or by arranging a home visit. This will be backed up by local services delivered in partnership with local authorities and voluntary sector organisations. Pensioners will receive letters explaining the changes fully and giving them all necessary contact details.

The Coleford Jobcentre will be moving to new premises in the near future, as the current premises do not meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Jobcentre Plus are also considering moving delivery of Social Security services from Cinderford to this new Coleford office. We will be reviewing the delivery of Jobcentre Plus services as part of the roll out the new integrated offices throughout Gloucestershire by 2005–06. No decisions have yet been made on their location.

All of these changes will be managed so as to ensure that high quality public services can be maintained throughout the transition to the new arrangements.

Automated Credit Transfer

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what provisions he plans to introduce for disability claimants to claim their benefits via ACT. [79153]

Malcolm Wicks: From April 2003, the normal method of payment for benefits and pensions will be direct into bank and building society accounts (including the Post Office card account).

All customers, including those in receipt of disability benefits, will be supplied with information which clearly sets out their account options. They can choose the bank or building society account (including the Post Office card account) which best meets their needs and circumstances.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what date each disability benefit switches to payments via ACT. [79154]

Malcolm Wicks: From April 2003 the normal method of payment for benefits and pensions will be direct into bank and building society accounts (including the Post Office card account).

The Department will invite existing customers to convert to payment into an account on a benefit by benefit basis. The precise dates for inviting disability benefit customers are yet to be finalised. However current proposals are that customers in receipt of Invalid Care Allowance will start to be contacted in June 2003 and customers in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance will start in August 2003. Customers do not need to take any action until they receive a letter from the Department about the change.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many married women since June 1997 have had claims for incapacity benefit disallowed on the grounds that they did not, in respect of one of the last three years before making a claim, pay before the relevant time contributions of a relevant class from which the earnings factor is not less than 25 times the lower earnings limit for that year. [78209]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* The information is not available.

Information is not collected about the marital status of those making claims to Incapacity Benefit, as it is not relevant to their claim; therefore claims made by married women cannot be disaggregated from those made by unmarried women.

Employment Initiatives

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the employment initiatives that are in place, who is eligible for each initiative, what help is offered in each case, and which schemes will be affected by the Minister for Social Exclusion's statement of 16th October. [78328]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Details of our employment programmes are set out in Appendix 3 of the Departmental Report 2002 (Cm 5424), a copy of which is available in the Library.

Our policies have created a strong economy geared to delivering stability, low inflation and sound public finances. Alongside this, our labour market policies promote attachment to the job market. As a result of our policies we have around the lowest number of unemployed people in a quarter century, and more people in work than ever before, with an increase in overall employment of almost 200,000 in the last year.

We are actively considering what more can be done to streamline our welfare to work programmes, achieve even greater coherence between the New Deals, and transfer lessons learnt into mainstream provision. But as my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Exclusion has made clear we have no plans to stop running Action Teams for Jobs, Employment Zones or the ethnic minority outreach service.

Schemes and Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the schemes and initiatives sponsored by his Department and its agencies which are not the subject of national roll out, showing *(a)* the authorities or areas covered by the scheme and *(b)* the budget of the scheme in the last year for which information is available. [75678]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The table provides information on the Department's current initiatives (at 21 October 2002) which are not part of a national roll out.

Initiative	*Budget 2002–03 (£m)*	*Areas covered*
Action Teams for Jobs	52.8	Selected wards in: Barnsley and Rotherham, Birmingham North, Birmingham South, Blackburn with Darwen, Blaenau Gwent, Brent, Brighton and Hove, Caerphilly, Chester-le-Street, Cornwall, Doncaster, Dundee, Easington, East Ayrshire, Glasgow Central and East, Glasgow North, Glasgow South, Glasgow West, Greenwich, Hackney, Halton, Haringey, Hartlepool, Highlands and Islands, Islington, Kingston upon Hull, Knowsley, Lambeth, Lewisham, Liverpool Central, Liverpool North, Liverpool South, Manchester Central, Manchester North, Manchester South, Merthyr Tydfil, Middlesbrough, Neath and Port Talbot, Newcastle upon Tyne, Newham, North Lanarkshire, North West Wales, Nottingham, Pembrokeshire, Plymouth, Redcar and Cleveland, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Salford, Sefton, Sheffield, South Tyneside, Southwark, St. Helens, Stockton-on-Tees, Sunderland, Thanet, Tower Hamlets, Wales Objective One, Waltham Forest, Wansbeck, West Dumbartonshire, Wirral, Wolverhampton
Ambition Construction[1]		Coventry, Knowsley, Leeds/Bradford, Manchester, Nottingham, Paddington

Initiative	*Budget 2002–03 (£m)*	*Areas covered*
Ambition IT	7.6	Manchester
Ambition Retail[1]		Bristol, Cardiff, Gateshead, Glasgow, Redditch
Attendance Allowance—trial of new claims procedures	0.25	Bristol and South West
Basic Skills pilots[1]		Jobcentre Plus Districts: Greater Nottingham, Wearside
Employment Zones	78.77	Birmingham, Brent, Brighton and Hove, Doncaster, Glasgow, Haringey, Heads of the Valley and Caerphilly, Liverpool Sefton, Middlesbrough, Newham, North West Wales, Nottingham, Plymouth, Southwark, Tower Hamlets.
Innovation Fund projects	5.7	Former Employment Service Units of Delivery: Aberdeen, Birmingham, Bradford, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hackney, Huddersfield, Keighley, Lewisham, Liverpool, Newham, Northumberland, Southend-on-Sea, Suffolk
Mentoring pilots	2.0	Former Employment Service Units of Delivery: Barnsley and Rotherham, Black Country, Borders, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff and the Vale, Greater Nottingham, Hereford and Worcester, Knowsley, Lanarkshire, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, North West Wales, Teesside, Thames Gateway
Minority Ethnic outreach projects	6.5	Selected areas in Jobcentre Plus Districts: Birmingham and Solihull, Bolton and Bury, Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees, City and East London, Coventry and Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Lewisham, London Central North East, London Central South, London North, London South East, Manchester North and South, Oldham and Rochdale, Sandwell and Dudley, Wolverhampton and Walsall
Step UP pilots	12.0	Selected wards in: Burnley, Cardiff, East Ayrshire, Great Yarmouth, Greenwich, Knowsley, Lambeth, Leeds, Manchester, Oldham, Rotherham, Sandwell, Sheffield, Sunderland [Further pilots will start in Bradford, Bristol, Coventry, Dundee, Hackney, Wrexham in November 2002]
Tailored pathway pilots	2.0	Former Employment Service Units of Delivery: Bath and North East Somerset, Brighton, Coventry, Dorset, Dumfries and Galloway, Ealing and Hillingdon, Glasgow, Greater Nottinghamshire, Knowsley, Mid Wales Powys and Ceredigion, Newport Torfaen and Monmouth, North East Wales, Southampton, Torbay and South Devon, Wakefield, Waveney, Wearside

Note:
[1] These initiatives are being funded through the New Deal and Innovation Fund, therefore separate budget figures are not available.

Health and Safety

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what help he gives businesses in the Scottish Borders to improve health and safety in the workplace. [75853]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department of Work and Pensions is the sponsor department for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the government body set up to help protect people at work.

Health and safety law is enforced in the Scottish Borders, as it is throughout Great Britain, either by HSE inspectors or inspectors from the relevant local authority, depending on the nature of the work activity. Businesses receive advice during inspection visits or they can contact their local enforcing authority. In addition, HSE works in partnership with other organisations such as Scottish Enterprise and trade associations to provide advice to businesses in Scottish Borders.

HSE provides information and advice on improving health and safety in businesses in a variety of other ways. HSE Infoline, a telephone public inquiry service, answers general inquiries, gives information about free and priced publications and directs callers to other sources of advice in HSE. Over 600 free publications are available from HSE's website (www.hse.gov.uk).

HSE is also assisting Scottish Executive and other stakeholders in Scotland in setting up an occupational health and safety support service for small and medium sized enterprises and their employees across Scotland. The service will provide telephone advice and guidance with the possibility of a workplace visit carried out by an occupational health nurse or equivalent health and safety specialist.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reform employer liability law. [75852]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department is currently engaging with other interested Government Departments, the Health and Safety Executive and non-governmental organisations including the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress and the Association of British Insurers to discuss their assessment of the long-term issues affecting employers' liability compulsory insurance.

Income Support

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of pensioners received part of their income from means-tested social assistance, benefits and income support in each of the last five years; and what his estimate is for this figure for the next five years. [78474]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. However around one third of pensioner benefit units have been in receipt of income-related benefits over the past five years. This proportion is expected to remain broadly constant over the next five years.

Notes:

1. We have defined pensioners by the Income Support definition i.e. where either partner is aged 60 or over.

2. Income related benefits have been defined as Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Income Support/Minimum Income Guarantee/Pension Credit. Each benefit unit is only counted once, for example a benefit unit in receipt of both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit won't be counted in each group.

3. All estimates provided are consistent with those supplied for the 2002 Spending Review, and include the estimated effects of Pension Credit and New Tax Credits where appropriate.

4. Estimates provided include people in residential care and nursing homes as well as private households.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what strategies his Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79294]

Mr. McCartney: Equality of opportunity for all staff is a key feature of all Civil Service employment. As part of this, ageism is not tolerated. Our Diversity and Equality policy statement specifies age as an area where we "will provide equality of opportunity". This equality of treatment extends also to the new external recruitment system where potential recruits will be selected on the basis of competencies.

The Department includes age as part of its equality proofing of policies and procedures. Our current HR Change Programme is continuously reviewing its recruitment, development, performance management and retention policies. Alongside this work we are implementing the outcomes of the Performance and Innovation Unit's "Winning the Generation Game" report.

All applicants and employees are treated fairly to enable them to develop and fulfil their potential, valuing the contribution each person can make to the organisation. Vacancies are open up to everyone up to the age of 65 and a person's age is not taken into account at any stage of the selection process.

In addition to its usual recruitment procedures the Department also recruits employees through the New Deal programme, both for Young People and 25 and 50 plus.

All staff in the Department, below the Senior Civil Service, are able to choose to remain beyond 60, up to the age of 65. Staff over 60 are subject to the same terms and conditions as staff under 60 with no special reviews of performance applied. The Department's flexible approach to age retirement allows staff to continue to work in their current grade and, subject to business need, to seek promotion to a higher grade or voluntarily to downgrade. Subject to business need staff may also choose to work full or part time.

Departmental Websites

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will list the web site links associated with his Department, including sites now dormant or closed, and indicating whether they are live, dormant or closed; what the start up costs were for each site listed; what the operating costs were in each year since start up for each site; which company hosted each site; what assessment takes place for each site; which company does the assessment; if he will place the assessment reports in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [75573]

Malcolm Wicks: The information on the start up and operating costs for Department's websites is only available in part. In-house staff maintain the department's websites and operation cost could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Web hosting and provision of web services is provided by the department's IT contractor. However, Internet services are not accounted for separately.

The departmental site www.dwp.gov.uk formerly the DSS site www.dss.gov.uk, was launched in August 2000 at a production cost of £183,650 for the research, design and building of the site. In December 2001 the site was redeveloped for DWP and broadened to include information for the new department at a cost of £48,193.

Qualitative and quantitative research of sites has taken place along with weekly monitoring of statistics. The companies used have been appointed through the Central Office of Information. The qualitative and quantitative research reports have been placed in the Library.

The information in the table details website associated with DWP and includes live, dormant and closed websites, all DWP sites are hosted on servers provided by Electronic Data Systems with the exception of New Deal which is on a Youthnet server managed by a third party. Costs have been included where available:

www.agepositive.gov.uk	Live	£104,172
www.benefitsagency.gov.uk	Closed	
www.bfi.gov.uk	Live	
www.csa.gov.uk	Live	
www.dwp.gov.uk/actionteams	Live	
www.dwp.gov.uk/employmentzones	Live	£10,500
www.employmentservice.gov.uk	Dormant	
www.dss.gov.uk	Dormant	
www.dwp.gov.uk	Live	£231,843
www.disability.gov.uk	Live	£74,500.
www.gogetpensions.gov.uk	Closed	
www.info4pensioners.gov.uk	Live	£12,531
www.itsa.gov.uk	Closed	
www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk	Live	£802,275
www.newdeal.gov.uk	Live	
www.one.gov.uk	Live	
www.pensionguide.gov.uk	Live	£89,670
www.esf.gov.uk	Live	
www.targetingfraud.gov.uk	Live	£2,666
www.thepensionservice.gov.uk	Live	£256,259
www.worktrain.gov.uk	Live	£2,151,253

PSA Targets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will place the data underlying

his Department's value for money scores in relation to the 1998 public service agreements in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [78970]

Mr. McCartney: The Department's Public Service Agreement (PSA) for the period 1999–00 to 2001–02 (published as Command Paper 4315) set out a number of value for money measures. These were reported on in the Department of Social Security's 2001 Departmental Report and the Department for Work and Pensions' annual report for 2002 (Command Papers 5115 and 5424 respectively), both of which are in the Library.

Pensions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent assessment he has made of the cost of reintroducing the link between the state pension and average earnings. [79765]

Mr. McCartney: Reintroducing the earnings link does nothing to help poorer pensioners. To do so would cost around £410m net in 2003–04 in today's prices. However, we will be spending an extra £6bn a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of policies introduced since 1997. This includes £2.5bn more on the poorest third of pensioners. This is three times more than an earnings link since 1998 would have given them.

Increases in the basic State Pension over the last two years have given single pensioners £2.10 a week more than an earnings link would have given them and £3.35 more for couples.

Note:

The costs of increasing the basic State Pension by earnings are in 2002–03 prices, rounded to the nearest £10m.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the *(a)* net cost of linking pensions to earnings and *(b)* surplus in the National Insurance Fund in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2010. [79362]

Mr. McCartney: The net cost to Government of increasing the basic State Pension by earnings, after taking account of savings in income-related benefits would be around £410 million in 2003–04 in 2002–03 prices.

The surplus in the National Insurance Fund for the year ending 31 March 2000 was £2,161m. Long-run projections of the National Insurance Fund are contained in the report by the Government Actuary on the costs of uprating the basic retirement pension in line with the general level of earnings (CM 4920).

Notes:

1. The net cost of increasing the basic State Pension by earnings is, in 2002–03 prices, rounded to the nearest £10m.

2. The Government Actuary's Department provides estimates of the cost to the National Insurance Fund of increasing the basic State Pension by earnings. Net costs are calculated using the DWP Policy Simulation Model.

3. The surplus in the National Insurance Fund for Great Britain is taken from National Insurance Fund accounts and is in cash terms, showing the excess of receipts over payments.

Winter Fuel Payments

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he has taken to ensure that winter fuel payments can continue to be paid to a non-eligible person who is in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance on behalf of a partner who is eligible for a payment. [80315]

Mr. McCartney: Regulations laid before Parliament on 24 October will permit winter fuel payments to be made, where Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance is in payment for a couple, to the partner who is claiming for both, even if that person is aged under 60 and it is the other member of the couple who is entitled to the winter fuel payment. This will ensure that around 15,000 households continue to receive winter fuel payments automatically and timeously, without the need to claim. Such payments to the non-eligible partner made for the last two winters (£3 million per year) were not supported by legislation and the Department's relevant accounts will be noted accordingly.

Post Offices

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information will be provided to pensioners regarding the introduction and use of Post Office card accounts; and if he will make a statement. [78079]

Malcolm Wicks: All customers will be supplied with information (including letters and leaflets), which clearly set out their "account options" so they can choose the bank or building society account (including the Post Office card account) which best meets their needs and circumstances.

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he has taken to implement the recommendations relevant to his Department in the Social Exclusion Unit report "Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners." [76806]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 24 October 2002, *Official Report* 1, 495W.

Benefits

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will introduce a fast-track scheme to provide interim advance payments to people who appear to have a valid claim to benefit; [79187]

(2) if he will introduce a fast-track scheme to provide interim advance payments to people who appear to have made a valid claim for benefit from the Social Fund. [79217]

Malcolm Wicks: We recognise that many people making a claim to benefit will be in need of immediate financial support. To avoid unnecessary hardship, discretionary payments on account of benefit can be made where a claim has not been determined but the Decision Maker is satisfied that the basic conditions of entitlement for the benefit are likely to be met.

Social Fund Crisis Loans can be made to people in an emergency where there are no other means of preventing serious damage or serious risk to health or safety. An inherent feature of Crisis Loan applications is that they should be dealt with on the day the need arises.

In the case of the regulated Social Fund, for example Sure Start Maternity Grants or Funeral Payments, it would not be appropriate to make interim awards pending receipt of a valid claim. However, we believe arrangements for both elements of the scheme are sufficiently flexible to allow staff to have regard to the urgency of an application.

Tax Credits

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the rules will be for passporting families to entitlement to the Sure Start maternity grant when the new tax credits come into force in April 2003. [77274]

Maria Eagle: From April 2003, Sure Start Maternity Grants will be payable to families receiving Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Tax Credit at a rate greater than the family element, or Working Tax Credit where a disabled worker is included in the assessment.

Applications may be made at any time from 11 weeks before the baby is due until three months after the birth, or up to three months after the date of an adoption or parental order.

Child support

Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimates he has made of the rate of compliance under the new Child Support Scheme; [76110]

(2) what estimate he has made of the change in the child support maintenance compliance rate that will result from the new scheme reforms. [79359]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* A target of 75 per cent. compliance, to be achieved by the end of 2003 and applying to cases assessed under the new scheme, was included in 2000 in the Public Services Agreement for the former Department of Social Security. We have a long-term goal of improving on this figure, as our experience of the new scheme increases.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the extent of delay in introducing new Child Support Agency assessment procedures. [78732]

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when the reforms of the CSA will be fully implemented [79004]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the letter sent to hon. Members on 19 September 2002 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, a copy of which was placed in the Library.

Social Fund

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people who applied for a budgeting loan in 2000–01 had an outstanding Social Fund loan; [77271]

(2) what his estimate is of the cost of replacing the double debt rule (Social Fund Direction 53), with a restriction based on just the amount owing. [77272]

Malcolm Wicks: The double debt rule is designed to ensure that people do not become over indebted by borrowing additional amounts from the Social Fund until they have repaid a reasonable proportion of the original loan. Further loans are refused to applicants who have an outstanding budgeting loan debt of more than half the maximum amount available to them. Once their existing debt drops to less than half they can reapply, although the amount of further loan available to them could still be affected by any outstanding debt.

It is estimated that the cost of abolishing the rule while broadly maintaining maximum amounts available, would be around £100m in the first year. The cost would fall to £25m in the second year and £10m in the third [1].

Information is not available on the number of people applying for budgeting loans who already have an outstanding Social Fund loan. However, during 2000–01, 1,114,000[2,3] applications were made for a Social Fund budgeting loan where there was an existing Social Fund debt. This figure will include cases where one person has made more than one application.

Note:

[3] The figure for applications from people with existing Social Fund debt includes Crisis Loan debt which is not subject to the double debt rule.

Sources:

[1] DWP Analytical Services Directorate using data from the Social Fund policy, budget and management systems and a scan of Social Fund computer system.

[2] Social Fund policy, budget and management systems and a scan of the Social Fund computer system.

Customer Service

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the benefit claims forms that referred claimants to the Citizens Advice Bureaux Service for assistance and advice in their completion as at 30th September; what percentage of documents issued referred benefits claimants to Citizens Advice Bureaux *(a)* in 2001 and *(b)* up to 30th September; and what discussions the Government has had with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux in respect of the inclusion of such references to advice. [76540]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 23 October 2002]*: In accordance with the expressed wishes of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Department routinely advises customers on its claim forms and other written information products that they may seek further advice from sources such as their local Citizens Advice Bureau.

The majority of our claim packs, covering most major benefits, include reference to the advice available from local Citizens Advice Bureau. We have recently

confirmed with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux that it is still their wish that we should do so. The purpose of the reference to local Citizen's Advice Bureaux is to make customers aware of the availability of their independent advisory services.

A list of the Department's Claim Packs that include such references is set out below.

Attendance Allowance
DS2
DS2A
DS1140—changes
DS263—reclaim
Child Benefit
CH2
Disability Living Allowance
(Adult)
DLA1
DLA1A
DLA434—changes
DLA580—reclaim
DLA581—reclaim
DLA582—reclaim
(Child)
DLA1
DLA1A
DLA434—changes
DLA580—reclaim
DLA581—reclaim
DLA582—reclaim
Guardian's Allowance
BG1
Invalid Care Allowance
DS700
Incapacity Benefit
SC1
SSP1
Income Support
A1
Industrial Injuries
BI100-OA
BI100-OD
BI100-A
BI100-B
BI100-C
BI100-E
BI100-PN
Jobseeker's Allowance
JSA2 review claim pack
Severe Disablement Allowance
SDA1
Social Fund
SF100 Maternity Payment
SF300 Community Care Grant
SF500 Budgeting Loan

Child Benefit

Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter to be sent to child benefit customers on 28th October informing them of their options for receiving benefit from April 2003. [76108]

Malcolm Wicks: A copy of the mailing sent to child benefit customers has been placed in the Library. The mailing consists of an invitation letter, supplementary information, a form to capture bank details and a pre-paid envelope. It explains account options that are open to customers and how to transfer to payment directly into an account.

Statistical Publications

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department's research programme for 2002–03 includes research into the impact on the health of mental health service users of his Department's benefits policies; and if he will make a statement. [78608]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department has no plans to conduct research into the impact on the health of mental health service users of the Department's benefit policies in its 2002–2003-research programme. However, the Department conducts a wide range of research with its service users, which includes mental health service users in receipt of benefits.

The Department publishes its research programme and all its commissioned research.

Fuel Poverty

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which of his Department's Public Service Agreements relate to fuel poverty reduction and what progress has been made to date in achieving them [79496]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions has no Public Service Agreement relating to a reduction in fuel poverty. Departments that do have Public Service Agreements on fuel poverty will report on progress against the targets in the Autumn Performance Reports, which will be published shortly.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what progress has been made in developing improvements to the Fuel Direct scheme; what the purpose of an improved scheme will be; and by what date a revised scheme is likely to be in place. [79495]

Malcolm Wicks: The Fuel Direct scheme is designed to protect the fuel supplies of people receiving income-related benefits—particularly families—who have run up arrears, by making payments direct from their benefit to the supplier until the debt is cleared. The scheme works well and there are no plans for a radical overhaul.

As part of the Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy the Department has been working with the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) to make a number of operational improvements to the scheme for the benefit of both customers and suppliers. The first stage of these improvements was introduced in March 2001 and work is underway to further rationalise the scheme.

Uprating

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions' pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 114W, on state pensions, if he

will increase the basic state pension increments paid to pensioners who retired before April 2002 so that they maintain their original proportionate value as outlined in Benefits Agency literature. [74742]

Mr. McCartney: The legal requirement, as set out in our literature, is that where people defer taking their pensions and, as a result, earn increments, then for every six days of deferral (excluding Sundays and days for which certain NI benefits are received) the amount of the increments will increase by about ½p for each £1.00 of the weekly rate payable at the time the person becomes entitled to the state pension. We are also obliged to increase all parts of state pension by at least the rate of RPI on an annual basis. We have met these legal requirements.

British Residents

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will issue advice to British nationals residing in the islands of *(a)* Martinique, *(b)* Guadeloupe and *(c)* Reunion on the rationale of paying winter fuel payments to them; [74560]

(2) when he was advised by the European Commission that the Government was obliged to pay winter fuel payments to British residents in the overseas territories of the EU; what legislation governs this requirement; and if he will list the cost of such payments, broken down by current overseas territory of the EU; [74558]

(3) if he will make a statement on his policy for paying the winter fuel payment to British residents in *(a)* French Guiana and *(b)* Guyana; and if he will make a statement on how to determine the location of the British nationals who reside for part of the year in each country. [74559]

Mr. McCartney: The Government, after careful consideration of its legal obligations under EC Regulation 1408/71 and discussions with the European Commission, concluded that certain people living in the EEA (or from winter 2002–3, Switzerland) could continue to get Winter Fuel Payments. I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave to my hon. Friend the member for Caephilly on 19 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 599w.

The EC regulation applies to member states, French overseas departments (Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Reunion), the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands. It also applies to Switzerland from 1 June 2002.

We estimate the annual cost of such payments to be around £10 million.

Eligible people, generally EEA nationals (which includes UK nationals) who qualified for a payment in Great Britain before moving to another EEA country will be able to continue receiving Winter Fuel Payments whilst they are ordinarily resident in another EEA country or Switzerland, provided that they continue to satisfy the eligibility criteria.

If a person lives in more than one country, a decision will need to be made to determine whether he is entitled under the current rules.

Notes:

Winter Fuel Payments can only be made to people living in Switzerland from this coming winter. This is because, while Switzerland is not a member of the EEA, a formal agreement between Switzerland and the European Community (EC) countries will enable the EU Social Security coordination regulations to apply between Switzerland and the EC countries. The agreement came into force from 1st June 2002 and therefore, for Winter Fuel Payments, applies from winter 2002–03, but not before.

However, the agreement does not extend to the three countries who are not part of the EC but who are part of the EEA, namely, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Therefore in some circumstances, Winter Fuel Payments may continue to be paid to people who are Swiss nationals who live in Switzerland or one of the EC countries, but not when they live in Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway. Similarly Winter Fuel Payments may continue to be paid to people who are nationals of Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway who live in an EEA country, but not when they live in Switzerland.

Ministerial Approval

Date

SoS Approval

PSL Approval

Basic Pensions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of how much the state pension will be worth over the next 50 years. [79745]

Mr. McCartney: The Government believe that the State Pension should remain the essential foundation of income in retirement.

The basic State Pension is currently £75.50 for single pensioners. In the short-term we have given the guarantee that the basic State Pension will be increased by at least £100 a year for single pensioners and £160 a year for couples in 2003–04. In future years, the basic State Pension will be increased by 2.5 per cent. or the increase in the September Retail Prices Index, whichever is the higher.

Based on current policy, we estimate that the rate of the basic State Pension will be around £76.25 in 50 years time in today's prices.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in which countries UK citizens entitled to receive the winter fuel allowance can reside and receive the allowance. [79065]

Mr. McCartney: UK citizens who are entitled to Winter Fuel Payments will continue to receive the payments if they move to another European Economic Area country or Switzerland, provided that they continue to meet the eligibility criteria.

TRANSPORT

Freight Vehicles (EU Regulations)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the 48 hour average working week restriction will apply to drivers of large freight vehicles; if operators can require drivers to work more than

48 hours without having to sign an opt-out agreement to EU Regulation 3820/85; and if he will make a statement. [74344]

Mr. Spellar: Directive 2002/15/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the organisation of the working time of persons performing mobile road transport activities was adopted on 11 March 2002 and must be transposed into national law not later than 23 March 2005. This directive, which matches the scope of Regulation (EEC) 3820/85 on drivers' hours, requires member states to ensure that the average weekly working time may not exceed 48 hours over a reference period of 4 months which may, in certain circumstances, be extended to 6 months. Neither directive 2002/15/EC nor Regulation 3820/85 provides for an opt out.

London Underground

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, (1) if he will list the sub-contracts entered into as part of the London Underground Public Private Partnership by *(a)* Bechtel, *(b)* Jarvis, *(c)* Amey, *(d)* Balfour Beatty, *(e)* W. S. Atkins, *(f)* Bombadier Transportation, *(g)* Thames Water, *(h)* Seeboard, indicating the (i) value and (ii) purpose of these sub-contracts; how many of these sub-contracts are with the above companies and connected businesses and how much these contracts are worth; [79535]

(2) if he will list for *(a)* Bechtel, *(b)* Jarvis, *(c)* Amey, *(d)* Balfour Beatty, *(e)* W.S. Atkins, *(f)* Bombadier Transportation, *(g)* Thames Water and *(h)* Seeboard, how much investment they have made into the London Underground Public Private Partnership to date; how much they are expected to invest and over what timescale; how much has (i) been paid to them from public funds and London Underground Limited to date and (ii) expected to be paid to them over *(A)* 70 years and *(B)* 30 years of the contracts they are involved in; [79539]

(3) if he will list each contract agreed in the London Underground Public Private Partnership with *(a)* Bechtel, *(b)* Jarvis, *(c)* Amey, *(d)* Balfour Beatty, *(e)* W. S. Atkins, *(f)* Bombadier transportation, *(g)* Thames Water and *(h)* Seeboard, indicating in each case the (i) value and (ii) purpose of the contract; [79474]

(4) what the estimated value to the London Underground is of investment via the Public Private Partnership by *(a)* Bechtel, *(b)* Jarvis, *(c)* Amey, *(d)* Balfour Beatty, *(e)* W. S. Atkins, *(f)* Bombadier Transportation, *(g)* Thames Water and *(h)* Seeboard over (i) 70 years and (ii) 30 years of the contracts they are involved in; whether this estimated value includes the profit element from these contracts to these companies; and if he will set out how this estimated value is calculated; [79540]

(5) what assessment he has made of the levels of profits likely to be achieved from contracts and sub-contracts associated with the London Underground Public Private Partnership in *(a)* seven and a half years and *(b)* 30 years by (i) Bechtel, (ii) Jarvis, (iii) Amey, (iv) Balfour Beatty, (v) WS Atkins, (vi) Bombadier Transportation, (vii) Thames Water and (viii) Seeboard. [79831]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground Limited is conducting a procurement exercise for each of the three contracts to modernise the London Underground's infrastructure. The preferred bidder for the JNP contract is Tube Lines Group. The preferred bidder for the BCV and SSL contracts is Metronet. London Underground is proposing to enter into contracts with these consortia, not the individual companies listed.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he expects to transfer responsibility for the London Underground Public Private Partnership to the Mayor of London and Transport for London; whether he expects to set conditions on the transfer; and if he will make a statement. [79475]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government will retain responsibility for London Underground until the competitions for the PPP contracts have been completed, as envisaged by the GLA Act 1999. The Mayor and Transport for London will inherit the PPP contracts when London Underground Limited is transferred in due course.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what representations his Department has made to the Mayor of London in relation to his plans to appeal about the PFI on London Underground to the European Courts. [79534]

Mr. Spellar: The Mayor's plans are a matter for him. A third legal challenge to the proposed PPP arrangements would simply delay further the investment the Underground system needs. There have already been two such delays, at significant cost to taxpayers in London.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other information (i) his Department and (ii) London Underground Limited collate on *(A)* Bechtel, *(B)* Jarvis, *(C)* Amey, *(D)* Balfour Beatty, *(E)* W.S. Atkins, *(F)* Bombadier Transportation, *(G)* Thames Water and *(H)* Seeboard in respect of the London Underground Public Private Partnership; and if he will make a statement. [79830]

Mr. Jamieson: The competitions for the PPP contracts to modernise the London Underground's infrastructure are the responsibility of London Underground Limited. The preferred bidders are Metronet and Tube Lines Group, each of which is a consortium. Assessment by London Underground, with its advisers, of the capacity of the preferred bidders to carry out their obligations under the contracts is an important part of the competitions. It is for London Underground, and not for the Government, to satisfy itself in relation to the bidding consortia.

Motorways

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those persons who have the right to direct that a stretch of motorway be closed to traffic in England and Wales; what criteria need to be applied in each case; and what *(a)* safeguards and *(b)* guidelines exist to ensure that such closure decisions are properly made before implementation. [79132]

Mr. Spellar: Two organisations can close a motorway: the police, under the emergency powers granted to them by the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 Section 67, and the relevant highway authority under Section 14, of the same act. The police use their powers to prevent obstruction of, or danger to or from, traffic as a result of extraordinary circumstances. In such an emergency, the police notify the highway authority that an incident has taken place, and ask for traffic management and diversion routes to be put in place. By their nature, closures by the police cannot be foreseen.

As far as the trunk road network is concerned, the Highways Agency, in its role as Network Operator, is working pro-actively with its maintaining agents and the police forces in England to better manage incidents and help reduce the knock-on effect of congestion.

Highway authorities are allowed to close roads where works on or near the road are likely to cause danger to the public or damage to the highway. Before closing a road, the authority is required to take account of the availability and suitability of alternative routes and, because closures are planned, advance warning is given.

On the trunk road network the Highways Agency is working closely with its contractors to introduce more effective construction and maintenance techniques leading to fewer hold-ups while essential repairs are carried out.

In either case, the decision to close a road is a matter for judgment taking into account the safety of the travelling public and, where appropriate, the workforce.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria there are on installing roadside speed cameras on stretches of road which have a bad safety record in advance of safer stretches of highway. [79133]

Mr. Spellar: Guidance on speed camera deployment is contained in Circular Roads 1/92. Additional rules and guidelines have been made available to those areas participating in the netting off funding system for safety cameras. In both cases the guidance is that speed cameras should be placed at sites and on routes where there is a history of speed-related crashes resulting in casualties.

Road Deaths

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many deaths there have been involving motorists on the hard shoulder of *(a)* motorway and *(b)* dualled trunk carriageways for which the Highways Agency is responsible in (i) 1997, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2001; and if he will make a statement. [79064]

Mr. Jamieson: In the last five years, including the years for which information was requested, the numbers of people killed in an accident involving motorists on the hard shoulder are.

	Motorways	*Dual Carriageway trunk roads*
1997	9	7
1998	24	6
1999	13	9
2000	16	19
2001	14	11

The numbers quoted for dual carriageway trunk roads also include people killed in lay-bys.

Compared to all road accidents on motorways and dual carriageway trunk roads, there are relatively few deaths directly caused by accidents on the hard shoulder. Road accident figures are constantly monitored to identify where road improvements would be effective.

Car Sharing

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what encouragement his Department offers to advance car sharing by its staff. [79337]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* The Driver Vehicle and Licensing Agency in Swansea operate a voluntary car sharing scheme for its staff. Staff registered on the database are encouraged to car share by the provision of a free emergency taxi service should their sharing travel arrangements break down unexpectedly.

Car Registration

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what his estimate is of the number of unregistered cars being driven; what plans he has to strengthen the law requiring registration and increasing penalties for non-registration; and if he will make a statement. [79115]

Mr. Jamieson: The National Roadside Survey of Vehicle Excise Duty evasion which took place in June 1999 showed the level of evasion as 3.9 per cent. of revenue due which equates to £191 million in 2001–02. This was offset by £110 million recovered through enforcement activities. The number of unlicensed vehicles at any one time is around 1 million vehicles.

We have introduced legislation which will make the registered keeper of a vehicle remain liable for it until a formal change of keepership is notified to DVLA. This system of continuous registration will help to improve the accuracy of the vehicle register which will lead to more efficient tax collection, and more effective enforcement. The legislation will be brought into force by regulations.

In addition DVLA is working closely with the police and local authorities to target unlicensed and abandoned vehicles. Last year, DVLA took successful action against 800,000 evaders recovering some £110 million in fines, penalties and re-licensing revenue.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates his Department has made of how many vehicles have not been registered by their present owners with the DVLC as having changed hands. [79026]

Mr. Jamieson: It is extremely difficult to provide a precise estimate of the number of vehicle keepers who failed to notify a vehicle transfer. The main problem is

one of delay when the new keeper fails to notify acquisition until the licence is due for renewal. This will be addressed by our planned introduction of a system of continuous registration which will encourage immediate notice of transfer.

Around 500,000 vehicles are currently shown on the register as "between keepers", the majority are in the hands of motor traders.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to encourage vehicle owners to register a change of ownership with DVLC. [79027]

Mr. Jamieson: The Modernising Vehicle Registration Implementation Board was established earlier this year with representatives from industry, motorists' organisations, the police and the insurance industry to advise my right hon. Friend on ways to improve procedures. The aim is to improve the accuracy of the vehicle register to combat vehicle crime, to help local authorities trace the owners of abandoned cars and to bear down on vehicle excise duty evasion.

Progress on these issues have been reported to the House in my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1138W and in my answer to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) on 21 October 2002 [*Official Report*, column 27W].

Rail Franchising

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement on rail franchising policy. [79825]

Mr. Darling: The Strategic Rail Authority has announced today a new approach to franchising. Under it the SRA will be much clearer what it expects from each train operating company. Train companies will not just be judged on whether trains run on time but also on the cleanliness of trains and stations, accurate travel information and passenger security.

The nature of the franchising structure put in place at privatisation has contributed to the difficulties in the railway industry—especially poor performance and variable quality of service.

Today, with the Government's support, the SRA has announced a new approach to franchising that puts passengers first. It intends to do so through: tighter specification of services, station standards, train cleanliness and journey quality; and robust incentives and penalties that will influence positively the behaviour of operators. These include: changes to the performance regime; quantified performance indicators for service and station quality, with payment by results; and a new approach to the award and management of franchises. The first franchise awarded under the new basis is expected to start operating in 2004.

The SRA has also announced proposals to make better use of the railway by combining franchises at key London stations—from 3 to 1 at Liverpool Street, from 2 to 1 at Waterloo and from 3 to 2 at Paddington.

Transitional arrangements are being put in place as it is not practical to award all of the franchises due to expire by 2004 simultaneously. The SRA has therefore made a number of detailed announcements on individual franchises today. These include: an invitation to Connex Transport UK Ltd and First Group/Keolis SA to proceed to detailed negotiations on Heads of Terms for the TransPennine franchise; negotiations with Arriva Trains Northern on an interim franchise to operate services until the Northern Rail franchise commences in 2004; a one-year extension to the current South West Trains franchise to February 2004 and the agreement of principles with Stagecoach Holdings plc for a new South West Trains franchise extending to 2007.

Further adjustments to franchise periods may be necessary to facilitate an orderly transition from the existing franchise regime to the new one. I shall be prepared to use my powers of direction under section 26 of the Railways Act 1993 for this purpose.

This announcement is another step towards delivering a reliable and safe railway and builds on the SRA's consultation on its Capacity Utilisation Strategy launched on 5 September.

Copies of the SRA's Franchising Policy Statement have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Railtrack

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what property rights the Government possessed in respect of the assets of Railtrack on 10 May. [79917]

Mr. Jamieson: In connection with the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, the Secretary of State had (and continues to have) rights under a Property Agreement entered into with Railtrack plc to buy from the company any land owned by the company which is needed for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, and certain rights of access.

Cliffe Airport Option

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the distance is from the mean low water mark on the OS map to the edge of the four runway Cliffe Airport Option at the nearest point; and whether the four runway Cliffe Airport Option would be built past the mean low water mark at any point. [79790]

Mr. Jamieson: The Cliffe option boundary, as published in the *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East* consultation document, is around 1300 metres from the general Mean Low Water (MLW) line (excluding inlets and streams) and would not require building past the MLW mark.

The precise location of this, and all other published options, should be considered as indicative only. If any option is supported in the air transport White Paper more detailed design and project definition will be required.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the distance is from the proposed edge of the four runway Cliffe Airport Option to the borough constituency boundary for Castle Point, at the closest point. [79787]

Mr. Jamieson: As published in *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* consultation document, the Cliffe option lies about 2.5 kilometres from the Castle Point borough boundary, at the closest point.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how high above the River Thames, at low tide, *(a)* the runways and *(b)* the highest buildings would be in the Cliffe Airport four runway option. [79788]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) analysis indicates that the runways associated with the Cliffe option would be between 12 and 15 metres above mean sea level. The analysis did not include either a calculation against low tide levels or the design of airport buildings and associated infrastructure.

If the option is supported in the air transport White Paper, more detailed design and project specification would be needed.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the proposed length is in the Cliffe Airport Option, of *(a)* the cross-wind runway and *(b)* the main east-west runways. [79789]

Mr. Jamieson: The Cliffe option published in *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* consultation document has a main east-west runway length of around 4000 metres. The diagonal runway is 3000 metres long. Both include an allowance for runway end safety areas.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what circumstances in the Cliffe Airport Option the cross-wind runway will be used for passenger movements. [79786]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 15 October 2002, [*Official Report*, column 724W].

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Palace of Westminster

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many members of the Metropolitan Police Fire Section are based within the precinct of the Palace of Westminster; and if he will list *(a)* their duties and *(b)* the equipment available for use in an emergency. [78597]

Mr. Kirkwood: There are 21 Metropolitan Police Fire Officers based on the Parliamentary Estate. Their duties include fire prevention, response to alarm calls, patrols of the estate to ensure fire safety measures are in place, together with initial response to fires. In the event of Fire Brigade Officers attending a fire, the role of the Metropolitan Police Fire Officers is to liaise, brief and guide. They are provided with personal protective clothing and they have access to hand held fire extinguishers.

Portcullis House (Fire Certificate)

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if, in the absence of a fire certificate for Portcullis House, the certificate of employers' liability insurance issued to hon. Members remain valid; and if the *(a)* fire safety doors, *(b)* alarm systems and *(c)* evacuation procedure meet British safety standards. [78596]

Mr. Kirkwood: Despite the delay in granting a fire certificate for Portcullis House, the employers' liability insurance arranged on behalf of Members remains valid.

The fire strategy for Portcullis House, which encompasses safety doors, alarm systems and evacuation procedures, conforms to British safety standards and the terms of relevant legislation. I will arrange for the hon. Gentleman to be supplied with further details if he wishes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Road Peace

Simon Hughes: To ask the Solicitor-General what actions she proposes to take to respond to representations from RoadPeace following their meeting with Ministers on 10 October, and if he will make a statement. [79619]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney and I recognise that fatal road traffic crashes have a devastating effect on the family and friends of the victim. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is committed to ensuring that such cases are dealt with sensitively and are reviewed by prosecutors with requisite experience. The Attorney and I will continue to ensure the CPS implements its commitment under the Victim's Charter and the Direct Communication with Victim's initiative to provide support to victims and those who have been bereaved as a result of road traffic offences.

The CPS has, since the meeting with RoadPeace, re-issued nationally to its staff a reminder to implement, so far as is possible, guidance provided in various cases, on how best to deal with situations where inquests and criminal proceedings arising out of the same incident are pending.

The CPS brings to the Law Officers' attention, in appropriate cases, sentences passed by the Crown Court for us to consider a referral to the Court of Appeal as an Unduly Lenient Sentence. Since the beginning of this year we have referred to the Court of Appeal 6 cases involving either death by dangerous driving or death by careless driving when over the prescribed limit for alcohol.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will publish the responses her Department receives to the consultation on the Criminal Justice White Paper and place them in the Library. [79620]

The Solicitor-General: The responses to the consultation exercise are currently being considered. I will make arrangements to publish those that we have received once that work is concluded.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Jim Cunningham: To ask the Solicitor-General what role the Crown Prosecution Service has in prosecuting antisocial behaviour orders. [75305]

The Solicitor-General: Pursuant to the answer, 24 October 2002, column 452W. Details for the final paragraph should read as follows:

There were prosecutions of 78 breaches of ASBO's occurring between January—December 2000, leading to convictions in 69 (9 were dismissed). 7 of the breaches were not proceeded with on public interest grounds.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Drinks Licences

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what plans he has to transfer responsibility for the granting of drinks licences in Northern Ireland from magistrates to local government authorities. [79768]

Mr. Browne: Northern Ireland has its own law on liquor licensing as contained in the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. There are no plans to transfer responsibility for the granting of drinks licences from magistrates to local authorities in Northern Ireland.

Gaming Machines

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will bring Northern Ireland legislation on gaming machines into line with that in the rest of the United Kingdom. [79199]

Mr. Browne: Northern Ireland has its own law on gaming machines which is included in the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. While this is broadly in line with the equivalent legislation in Great Britain, there are significant differences which take account of local circumstances in Northern Ireland. I have no plans to change this arrangement.

Wind Farms

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many representations in each of the last five years he has received recommending an increase in the speed with which planning applications for wind farms are considered. [78997]

Angela Smith: The Secretary of State's office has not received any such representations during the period specified.

HMS Caroline

Mr. MacKinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will have discussions with the Ministry of Defence to bring about the future use of HMS Caroline as part of the wider tourist attractions of the Belfast Harbour and River Lagan. [78362]

Mr. Pearson: HMS Caroline is currently a training ship of the Ulster Division of the Royal Navy Reserve (RNR) docked in Titanic Quarter, Belfast. I understand that the RNR has plans to build a new on-shore base in Belfast once the finance becomes available and as a result, HMS Caroline will be surplus to requirements. However, until the shore base plans are implemented, HMS Caroline will remain a training ship.

I will ask the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to explore with relevant partners, including the Ministry of Defence, possibilities for the future use of HMS Caroline.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 24th October 2002, *Official Report*, column 476W, on selective schools, what his estimate is of the level of public support for the retention of grammar schools in Northern Ireland. [79313]

Jane Kennedy: Grammar schools are popular with parents and, like many other schools, are oversubscribed each year with applications for places.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

European Union

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Ministers were informed of plans to introduce an EU top level domain; and if he will make a statement on the accuracy of his Department's initial press briefings on this subject. [78126]

Mr. MacShane: The information requested is not available at this time. However, I shall write to the hon. Member with a full answer as soon as possible.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the European Union offices outside of the EU, indicating the number of permanent staff; what the annual running cost is, of each office; what the diplomatic status of staff is; and if he will make a statement on the relationship between his Department and them. [78116]

Mr. Macshane: There are 144 European Delegations in Third party countries, employing a total of 843 permanent staff:

Delegation	*Permanent Staff*
Afghanistan, Kabul	8
Albania, Tirana	11
Algeria, Algiers	9
Angola, Luanda	5
Antigua and Barbuda, St. John's	0
Argentina, Buenos Aires	6
Armenia, Yerevan	0
Australia, Canberra	3
Bahamas, Nassau	0

Delegation	Permanent Staff
Bangladesh, Dhaka	10
Barbados, Bridgetown	6
Belarus, Minsk	0
Belize, Belize City	0
Bepin, Cotonou	9
Bolivia, La Paz	5
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo	9
Botswana, Gaborone	4
Brazil, Brasilia	9
Bulgaria, Sofia	7
Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou	11
Burundi, Bujumbura	3
Cambodia, Phnom Penh	2
Cameroon, Yaoundé	9
Canada, Ottawa	5
Cape Verde, Praia	1
Central African Rep., Bangui	4
Chad, Ndjamena	5
Chile, Santiago	5
China, Beijing	18
China, Hong-Kong	4
Colombia, Bogota	8
Comores, Moroni	1
Congo, Rep., Brazzaville	3
Costa Rica, San Jose	2
Croatia, Zagreb	7
Cuba, Havana	1
Cyprus, Nicosia	3
Czech, Rep., Prague	8
Democratic Rep. of Congo, Kinshasa	6
Djibouti, Djibouti	1
Dominican Rep., Santo Domingo	7
Egypt, Cairo	13
El Salvador, San Salvador	0
Equador, Quito	0
Equatorial Guinea, Malabo	1
Eritrea, Asmara	3
Estonia, Tallin	6
Ethiopia, Addis Ababa	12
Fiji, Suva	4
Fyr Macedonia, Skopje	5
Gabon, Libreville	5
Gambia, Banjul	1
Georgia, Tbilissi	9
Ghana, Accra	7
Grenada, St. George's	0
Guatemala, Guatemala City	5
Guinea, Conakry	8
Guinea-Bissau, Bissau	3
Guyana, Georgetown	4
Haiti, Port Au Prince	5
Honduras, Tegucigalpa	0
Hungary, Budapest	7
India, New Delhi	12
Indonesia, Jakarta	9
Israel, Tel Aviv	6
Ivory Coast, Abidjan	11
Jamaica, Kingston	5
Japan, Tokyo	18
Jordan, Amman	8
Kazakhstan, Almaty	9
Kenya, Nairobi	13
Kingdom of Tonga, Nuku'alofa	0
Korea, Seoul	5
Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek	0
Laos, Vientiane	1
Latvia, Riga	6
Lebanon, Beirut	8
Lesotho, Maseru	3
Liberia, Monrovia	0
Lithuania, Vilnius	6
Madagascar, Antananarivo	10
Malawi, Lilongwe	6
Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur	2
Mali, Bamako	9
Malta, Valetta	4
Mauritania, Nouakchott	5
Mauritius, Port Louis	5
Mexico, Mexico City	6
Moldava, Chisinau	0
Morocco, Rabat	11
Mozambique, Maputo	7
Namibia, Windhoek	5
Nepal, Kathmandu	1
Netherlands Antilles, Willemstad	1
New Caledonia, Noumea	1
Nicaragua, Managua	13
Niger, Niamey	9
Nigeria, Abuja	7
Norway, Oslo	3
Pakistan, Islamabad	9
Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby	4
Paraguay, Asunció	1
Peru, Lima	6
Philippines, Manila	7
Poland, Warsaw	11
Romania, Bucharest	9
Russia, Moscow	23
Rwanda, Kigali	5
Samoa, Apia	0
Sao Tome and Príncipe, São Tome	1
Saudi Arabia, Riyadh	2
Senegal, Dakar	8
Sierra Leone, Freetown	4
Singapore, Singapore	1
Slovakia, Bratislava	6
Slovenia, Ljubljana	6
Solomon Islands, Honiara	1
South Africa, Cape Town	0
South Africa, Pretoria	12
Sri Lanka, Colombo	1
Sudan, Khartoum	3
Surinam, Paramaribo	1
Swaziland, Mbabane	2
Switzerland, Geneva	18
Syria, Damascus	9
Tajikistan, Dushanbe	0
Tanzania, Dar es Salaam	9
Thailand, Bangkok	12
Togo, Lomé	2
Transjordan and Gaza Strip, Jerusalem	10
Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain	2
Tunisia, Tunis	10
Turkey, Ankara	9
Uganda, Kampala	7
Ukraine, Kiev	11
United States of America, New York	11
United States of America, Washington	25
Uruguay, Montevideo	8
Vanuatu, Port Vila	1
Venezuela, Caracas	7
Vietnam, Hanoï	9
Yogoslavia, Belgrade	6
Zambia, Lusaka	7
Zimbabwe, Harare	4
Floater, Missions	5
Total	843

Note:
Where no permanent staff are listed, delegations are managed in entirety by locally engaged staff.

The total allocation under Title A6 of the budget (Staff and Administrative Expenditure of European Community Delegations) for 2002 is €273.3 million.

Whether or not delegation officials enjoy diplomatic status depends on the individual arrangements agreed between the European Commission and the relevant host country or organisation.

Diplomatic List

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure that individuals on secondment from the private sector in embassies are marked as such in the Diplomatic List, listing the firm from which they originated and the dates of their secondment. [78156]

Mr. Rammell: The Diplomatic Service List normally includes only established members of the Diplomatic Service. Although secondees from the private sector and other Government Departments may be entitled to diplomatic privileges when abroad, they are not established members of the Diplomatic Service. The relatively short duration of secondments from the private sector means that, if included, entries for secondees could well be out of date by the time the list was published.

Arms Sales (Iraq)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his Serbian counterpart regarding deliveries of Yugoslav arms to Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [79553]

Mr. MacShane: We are very concerned about recent reports of arms sales from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to Iraq. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I raised this with the Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Dr. Goran Svilanovic, when he visited the UK on 30–31 October. We urged the Yugoslav Government to investigate the matter fully and bring criminal prosecutions against those responsible. We will continue to press for a thorough investigation.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make a statement on the NATO operation in the Bosnia entity of Republika Srpska related to the sale of military equipment to Iraq. [79550]

Mr. Macshane: NATO Stabilisation Force troops carried out a two-day search of the Bosnian Serb government owned Air Force Institute, Orao, on 11–13 October. The search uncovered evidence that Orao had been providing spare engine parts for Iraqi MiG fighter jets, as well as technical assistance in repairing the engines.

Lord Ashdown, the High Representative in Bosnia, made a statement on 27 October demanding an immediate end to such assistance to Iraq and a full enquiry. He called for all those responsible to be brought to account, and for new controls to prevent any recurrence.

A number of officials have since been dismissed. On 30 October, the State government announced a total ban on all arms imports and exports. We strongly support Lord Ashdown's proposals, and will continue to make clear to Bosnian leaders the need to address this as a matter of urgency.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what strategies his Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79290]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All recruitment to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. This is in line with the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code. It means that all applicants are treated equally regardless of age, gender or marital status, ethnic origin or disability.

There are upper age limits for application to join the Diplomatic Service. Applicants must be able to complete at least one overseas tour before the normal retirement age. This allows us to achieve a sensible return on recruitment and training costs.

Zimbabwe

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of human rights abuse in Zimbabwe; if he will list the human rights abuses perpetrated in Zimbabwe that have been *(a)* reported to and *(b)* investigated by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [79327]

Mr. Rammell: Zimbabwe's human rights record is appalling. In its latest report on political violence dated 9 October, the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum recorded 223 cases of abduction/kidnapping, 7 of rape, 1057 of torture and 58 of murder, in the period 1 January to 30 September 2002. Most of the violence has been perpetrated by Zimbabwe's ruling party, ZANU(PF). The vast majority of victims are opposition supporters, or those suspected of being such.

The international community, including the UK, has consistently condemned these abuses and called on the Zimbabwe Government to respect their obligations under international human rights conventions. The EU, the US and others have imposed targeted sanction on the Mugabe regime and the Commonwealth has suspended Zimbabwe from its Councils.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the adequacy of food supplies in Zimbabwe; what steps he has taken to monitor the future availability of adequate food supplies for the population of Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [79326]

Mr. Rammell: The food situation in Zimbabwe remains of serious concern. We, and other donors, are doing all we can—through the UN World Food Programme and Non-Governmental Organisations—to ensure that international aid reaches the needy regardless of their political views. There is credible evidence however that other sources of food, controlled by the ZANU PF regime, are being used in support of its political objectives. We deplore this, as well as the obstruction of the work of certain Non-Governmental Organisations, which also appears to be politically motivated.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects for foreign investment in Zimbabwe. [79329]

Mr. Rammell: The prospects for foreign investment in Zimbabwe are poor. Figures show that it has declined by 99 per cent. since 1998. The reasons are obvious. Zimbabwe is one of the world's fastest shrinking economies. It has lost the support of major donors and international financial institutions. Its skilled labour force, faced with over 70 per cent. unemployment, food shortages and 140 per cent. inflation, is leaving the country. On top of this, the current regime in Harare has undermined the rule of law and the right to hold private property.

Conflict Prevention

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list by country the projects funded by his Department under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool and the amount given to each. [79560]

Mr. Rammell: The Global Conflict Prevention Pool is run jointly by FCO, MOD and DFID. The Pool is divided into strategies, some of which cover regions or themes and some cover specific countries as listed below.

In Financial Year 2002–3 the geographical strategies and allocations are:

Afghanistan—£18,070,000

Balkans—£8,550,000

Belize/Guatemala—£2,101,990

Central & Eastern Europe—£10,940,000

Indonesia/East Timor—£2,053,761

Kashmir—£1,628,000

Middle East—£5,850,000

Nepal—£6,781,548

Russia/FSU—£8,160,000

Sri Lanka —£668,973

In Financial Year 2002–3 the thematic strategies and allocations are:

EU Civilian Crisis Management—£450,000

OSCE/CoE—£1,630,000

Security Sector Reform—£2,830,395

Small Arms & Light Weapons—£11,150,000

United Nations (capacity building for peacekeeping and conflict prevention)—£14,529,673

Within these strategies there is a wide range of projects. A report on the operation of the Global Conflict Prevention Pool will be published after the end of its first two years of operation in May 2003.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the criteria are for the disbursement of funds from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool to *(a)* Macedonia, *(b)* Kosovo, *(c)* Bosnia, *(d)* Indonesia and *(e)* East Timor; how much was allocated from the pool for the purchase of equipment to each in (i) 2001 and (ii) 2002; and if he will make a statement. [79558]

Mr. Rammell: The criteria for all projects funded by the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, wherever they take place, are drawn from the Public Service Agreement target:

"Improved effectiveness of the UK contribution to conflict prevention and management as demonstrated by a reduction in the number of people whose lives are affected by violent conflict and a reduction in potential sources of conflict, where the UK can make a significant contribution."

This is a joint target for the three departments involved in the Pool, FCO, MOD and DFID.

The GCPP's programme funds are disbursed to strategies agreed by the Ministerial committee responsible for managing the Pool. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her today (UIN 79560) which provides a full list of the current strategies and their allocations.

Activity in Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia is funded from the Balkans strategy. This strategy has four strands: Access to Justice, Strengthening Democracy and Inter-Ethnic relations, Security Sector Reform and Countering Organised Crime.

Activity in Indonesia and East Timor is covered by the Indonesia/East Timor strategy. This strategy is divided into three strands: Security Sector Reform in Indonesia, Conflict Reduction in Indonesia and Conflict Prevention in East Timor.

The specific information about equipment purchase will take some time to confirm. I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what equipment will be purchased with the money *(a)* allocated to logistical equipment, *(b)* allocated to communications equipment and *(c)* for equipment in support of military intelligence for Nepal under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool. [79559]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The total for military support under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool for this financial year is £3,669,000. This can be broken down as follows.

1. £250,000 on bomb disposal equipment and training for the Nepalese security forces

2. £149,000 on support and training for the newly formed Military Intelligence Support Group (MISG) within the Royal Nepalese Army, including tactical radios and night-vision telescopes and binoculars

3. £2,600,000 on two transport helicopters

4. £460,000 to provide training in human rights awareness, peace support operations and in civil-military co-operation.

5. £210,000 towards infrastructure costs for the regional UN peacekeeping centre at Panchkal.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Baton Rounds

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make a statement on the use of the L21A1 baton round at a range of less than 20 metres. [80353]

Mr. Denham: At the request of the Association of Chief Police Officers, which believes that the improved accuracy of the L21A1 baton round means it is suitable for use in serious public disorder and also in dealing with individuals posing an immediate threat to life in circumstances where use of a conventional firearm may otherwise be necessary, we have sought and received a medical statement from the Defence Scientific Advisory Council on the use of the L21A1 baton round at ranges from 1 to 19 metres. This supplements their earlier assessment of the injury potential over longer ranges published on 2 April 2001.

The statement confirms that the probability of unintentional impact to the most vulnerable parts of the body remains low when the round is discharged at ranges of less than 20 metres and that there is no significant change in the probability of rounds striking the potentially vulnerable chest area. This means that the likelihood of serious injury or death occurring as the result of the impact of an L21A1 baton round is no greater at ranges between 1 and 19 metres than at the longer ranges which were the subject of the earlier statement by the Defence Scientific Advisory Council.

I will today be placing a copy of the statement in the Library. The Association of Chief Police Officers is considering, in consultation with the Government, what, if any revision to its existing guidelines on the use of baton rounds may be appropriate in the light of this statement.

Nationality Instructions

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will place copies of the instructions to Immigration and Nationality Directorate staff dealing with applications for British citizenship in the Library. [80354]

Beverley Hughes: The Nationality Instructions contain guidance to staff on the handling of applications for British nationality and related matters. A version of these Instructions has now been added to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's website and hard copies are being placed in the Library. The Instructions are being made available in accordance with the principles of openness in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and in the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. A small amount of material cannot be disclosed, either on the grounds of national security or because disclosure would impede the effective administration of the legislation. The material is subject to periodic review and revision.

Passports

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what representations he has received concerning children under 18 holding BNOCO BDTC passport; and if he will make a statement. [78873]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

None.

Stalking

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what measures the Government have taken to reduce the number of women being stalked; [78821]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards stalking, with particular reference to younger women. [78822]

Hilary Benn: The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 provides the legal framework for the prevention of offending, and punishment of those pursuing a course of conduct which is alarming or distressing to another, or in the worst cases causes another to fear violence. The Government are committed to reducing this type of crime, as with all violent crime, particularly when it is perpetrated against vulnerable individuals.

Following the 1997 legislation we commissioned the guide "Stalking and other forms of harassment: An investigator's guide", written by Hamish Brown from the Metropolitan Police. This provides advice in the main for police officers about how to use various pieces of legislation to deal with those causing harassment but it also contains advice for victims.

We have also conducted a number of research studies into various types of behaviour related to harassment. Research suggests that a substantial proportional of harassment is carried out by ex-partners. Domestic violence is a key priority across government. A cross-departmental Ministerial Group is currently looking at five areas for action: increasing safe accommodation choices for women and children; developing early and effective healthcare intervention; Improving the link between criminal and civil law; ensuring a consistent and appropriate response from the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); and promoting education and awareness raising.

Data Protection

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guidance he has issued to public authorities about the procedures for the collection of communications data under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 with regard to industrial action; and if he will make a statement. [77240]

Mr. Blunkett: The access to communications data provisions in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) have not yet been implemented. I will be bringing forward new proposals in relation to any additional public authorities under Chapter II of Part I of RIPA following detailed public consultation. However, the RIPA does not provide for access to communications data for purposes relating to industrial action. A strict test of "necessity" must be met before any communications data is obtained under RIPA. An authorising officer must not only consider the communications data to be necessary but must also consider the conduct involved in obtaining the communications data to be "proportionate" to what it seeks to achieve. The grounds on which it is necessary, for example, include: in the interests of national security; for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime or of preventing disorder.

Fire Safety

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he expects to receive the conclusions and recommendations of the review that he has commissioned into fire safety precautions and the use of sprinklers in young offender institutions, adult prisons and detention centres. [45746]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 March 2002]:* The report is in its final stages of preparation and I would expect to receive it soon.

Criminal Record Checks

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans he has to suspend the checking of applicants from voluntary organisations by the Criminal Records Bureau; and what alternative arrangements he will put in place. [76016]

Hilary Benn: There are no plans to suspend checks of applicants from voluntary organisations. Due to current operational difficulties being experienced by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), it has been necessary to announce proposals to postpone mandatory checks under certain regulations arising from the Care Standards Act 2000. These would apply to voluntary organisations and to any other bodies which are subject to there regulations. The Government remain committed to introducing mandatory checks in these areas at the earliest possible opportunity. For the time being, even without the CRB check, the regulations and national minimum standards will help to improve standards and protect service users.

Fire Service Cover

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what preparations he has made to ensure the safety and continuity of service to the public in the event of a firefighters' strike. [77666]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and the Regions on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 527W.

Security Operation (Barrow-in-Furness)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* anti-terrorist officers were involved in the security operation at Barrow-in-Furness for the docking of the Pacific Pintail and Pacific Teal vessels in September, and if he will make a statement. [77771]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

Security for the transportation of nuclear material is regulated by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), the security regulator. It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken in connection with nuclear material.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ghana

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assistance her Department has given to expanding access to clean and affordable water for the people of Ghana; and if she will make a statement. [77698]

Clare Short: The Government of Ghana decided some years ago to invite tenders from the private sector to improve the delivery of publicly owned water services in Accra. This policy was agreed by the previous government and supported by the government elected in December 2000.

Ghana has faced a barrage of misleading campaigning suggesting that this is a privatisation—which it is not and that the poor will suffer. In fact the urban poor currently receive no water services and pay very high prices for water they purchase by the bucket.

My Department has provided £10 million to support this reform which was put in place by Ghana's democratic elected government and will improve water services for the poor.

HIV Vaccine

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the contribution the UK can make towards the development of a vaccine against HIV for use in the developing world. [77699]

Ms Keeble: The UK is making a significant contribution to work on developing AIDS vaccines. For example, the Medical Research Council in partnership with Oxford and Nairobi Universities are making very good progress on vaccines designed specifically for use in Africa. These trials are due to take place in the next few years. My Department has contributed £14 million to this work over the last 5 years.

Malawi

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in Malawi. [77700]

Clare Short: A recent assessment concluded that 2.2 million people will be in need of food assistance between September and December 2002, and that this will rise to 3¼ million—or one third of the population in early 2003.

My Department is playing a leading role in a partnership with the Government of Malawi, and other donors to try to cope with the crisis. DFID has so far provided £30 million emergency assistance to Malawi.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what proposals her Department has to meet the targets and outcomes agreed at the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development. [77701]

Clare Short: The World Summit strengthened the international community's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and added an important new target on access to sanitation. The international summits of the last two years have established a clear international consensus on the action needed to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development. We now need a period of intensive implementation. The world community must deliver on the promises it has made. My Department will play its full part in making this happen.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what plans there are by members of her Department to visit Sri Lanka to discuss possible assistance for redevelopment; and if she will make a statement. [77702]

Clare Short: My Department maintains an office within the British High Commission in Colombo. Staff in this office are working to develop a range of programmes to support the peace process, rehabilitation and reconciliation.

We are providing £2.6 million through the United Nations, to help returning Internally Displaced Persons re-establish their livelihoods. Assistance has also been provided to the Government of Sri Lanka to help direct and co-ordinate international assistance. Further support will be considered in the light of needs assessments currently being completed.

Sanitation Target

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what her Department will be doing to make sure the target of halving the number of people without access to adequate sanitation by 2015 is met. [77703]

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the target for halving the number of people without access to adequate sanitation by 2015 is met [77711]

Clare Short: We worked very hard to win international agreement to the sanitation target. Diarrhoeal disease accounts for over 2 million child deaths each year and this can be reduced by better hygiene practices, safer water supplies and provision of sanitation. Provision of access to safer water, basic sanitation and improved hygiene must be driven forward together to have the greatest impact in the health and livelihoods of the poor—more than half the world's population have no access to sanitation. My Department's bilateral expenditure on sanitation, hygiene promotion and clean water in the past three years is:

1999–2000	84.3 million
2000–2001	90.6 million
2001–2002	87.2 million

UNRWA

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on Britain's contribution to UNRWA. [77704]

Clare Short: The UK is UNRWA's second largest bilateral donor. Our contributions to UNRWA's General Fund, emergency appeals, and technical co-operation, have risen from £8.5 million in 1999 to planned expenditure in 2002 of about £22 million. This reflects the rising numbers of refugees, our increased confidence in UNRWA's operations, and the emergency situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what additional support she will make available to UNWRA to deal with the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza. [77706]

Clare Short: Over the last two years, in response to the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, we have contributed a total of £20 million to UNRWA's emergency appeals. This includes an additional contribution of £2 million this year which I confirmed to Commissioner-General Hansen in October. Emergency funding is in addition to our contributions to UNRWA's regular schooling, healthcare and social services programmes.

Afghanistan

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what her policy is on humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. [77705]

Clare Short: The latest UN assessment shows that 4.2 million people are still dependent on food aid. Very large numbers of people are also vulnerable to the effects of winter. It is important that the international community works with the Afghan authorities to ensure that basic humanitarian needs are met, whilst seeking to avoid creating a dependency culture. This means, where feasible, shifting to a more sustainable form of assistance (cash for work rather than food for work).

I have recently approved additional allocations of £11 million for the provision of humanitarian assistance during the coming winter, through the relevant UN agencies.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what plans she has to increase aid to Afghanistan [77712]

Clare Short: At the Tokyo donor conference in January this year I pledged £200 million over five years to support humanitarian and reconstruction needs in Afghanistan. In 2002–03, we originally planned to spend £40 million through UN agencies, NGOs and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. I have since increased this amount by £25 million, to help meet the increased humanitarian needs over the coming winter, and to help clear Afghanistan's arrears to the International Financial Institutions so that they can receive new concessional credits from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. In addition, we have earmarked £1.8 million of our annual contribution to the UN Mines Advisory Service for Afghanistan.

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a further statement on progress towards reconstruction in Afghanistan. [77714]

Clare Short: Much has been achieved in Afghanistan over the last 10 months. There is peace and security in Kabul, a legitimate transitional Government, a new national currency, nearly 2 million refugees have returned home and 3 million children are in school.

But the situation remains fragile. Afghanistan is a desperately poor country and the south is facing its fifth year of drought and between 4 million and 6 million people are still dependent on food aid. The situation outside Kabul remains insecure, warlords control large militias and large parts of the economy are dependent on narcotics.

Further progress requires the establishment of security outside Kabul and an increase in the capacity of the Government to deliver services across the country. The UK will remain engaged to support continuing progress and development.

EuroMed Process

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with other Government Departments about support for the EuroMed process [77707]

Clare Short: My Department has regular dialogue across Whitehall on issues relating to the EuroMed process. We work closely with the FCO and other Government Departments—and the European Commission, member states and EuroMed partner countries—to support the goals of the Barcelona Declaration that are relevant to my Department's work, including respect for human rights, creating an area of shared prosperity and developing human resources. This includes contributing to improved efficiency and quality of the EC's MEDA programme in working to benefit the poorest and most vulnerable people in the region.

Public Interest Organisation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to encourage the growth of non-profit and voluntary public interest organisations in developing countries [77708]

Clare Short: Our commitment to strengthen the voices of civil society in developing countries was set out in the 1997 white paper "Eliminating World Poverty—Challenge for the 21st Century" and the 2000 White Paper "Making Globalisation work for the poor". We are now engaging directly with a wide range of civil society organisations in developing countries, to strengthen and build their capacity to help poor and excluded people to organise and get their voices heard.

A significant number of DfID country programmes have developed programmes to help civil society to fulfil their role. Examples of larger programmes include:

Programme	*Country*	*Value*
Poorest area civil society programme PACS	India	£27 M
Human rights & governance programme HUGO	Bangladesh	£16.5 M
Civil Society and Poverty Programme	Tanzania	£6.84 M
Strengthening capacities for transformation SCAPE	South Africa	£4.15 M
Through rights to needs for marginalised Malawians TRANSFORM	Malawi	£3.5 M

There is also an important role for UK civil society in strengthening civil society capacity within developing countries. The main channel of support to UK groups is through the Civil Society Challenge Fund which spends some £10 million a year. The aim is to support initiatives, implemented through an effective partnership with a developing country civil society organisation, which strengthens the capacity of that organisation to engage in local, national and international decision-making processes.

Heroin (Afghanistan)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to combat the planting of the 2003 heroin crop in Afghanistan by promoting and supporting alternative employment possibilities. [77709]

Clare Short: During 2002 it is estimated that between 20–30 per cent. of the opium poppy crop was destroyed through a UK led eradication and compensation scheme. However a more permanent solution to the problem of poppy crop production will only come about once alternative livelihood opportunities have been identified for poor people, and the law is enforced against opium traders and other criminal elements. My department is working closely with the Afghan authorities to strengthen law enforcement, interdiction and eradication capabilities, and supporting a number of initiatives to improve security and the overall environment for the generation of alternative livelihoods. I also recently approved £1 million of support to a UNDP administered National Area Based Programme that is expected to generate thousands of jobs in rural areas, and £1 million of support to the Aga Khan Foundation for a rural support programme in Badakhshan, a major poppy producing province in Afghanistan.

Africa

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of *(a)* trends in spending on international development aid to Africa by the UK since 1997 and *(b)* that of other member states of the European Union [77710]

Clare Short: Over the period 1997–2000 (the latest year for which comparable data are available) the level of UK bilateral official development assistance (oda) to Africa has increased by 43 per cent. Over the same

period, oda to Africa from all EU members has fallen by 21 per cent. Excluding the UK, this fall becomes 36 per cent. Within this total, Germany's oda has fallen by 60 per cent., France's by 55 per cent. and Italy's by 23 per cent.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what the outcomes were of the World Bank annual meeting in connection with the alleviation of poverty in Africa. [77715]

Clare Short: At the Annual Meetings Ministers recognised the special challenges faced by Africa in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. They urged the World Bank and the IMF to scale up assistance to these countries, and to build on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative as a unique opportunity to make significant and quick progress working with African leadership. They recognised that aid will be more effective where is it well co-ordinated and aligned with country-owned strategies. Further pledges to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Trust Fund would benefit the 32 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that receive debt relief under the Enhanced HIPC Initiative.

Human Rights Training (South Africa)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement about UK funding for police training on human rights in the Southern African Development Community. [77713]

Clare Short: My Department supports human rights training in Malawi through a course involving the Police, the Anti-Corruption Bureau, Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman. We have also supported human rights police training in South Africa's Eastern Cape province. In Lesotho and South Africa we are supporting the creation of community police fora to help foster trust between the police and those that they serve. These activities fall within broader justice sector programmes that seek to ensure that the poor, who are often the most vulnerable to crime and exploitation, can access proper and impartial justice.

Palestine

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what measures the Government have taken in respect of the relief of poverty in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. [77716]

Clare Short: We support a wide range of initiatives to help meet both the urgent short term needs of the Palestinian people as economic and social conditions decline dramatically, and their longer term aspirations of a viable and sustainable state. As part of a wider international effort we work directly with the Palestinian Authority and other Palestinian organisations, and through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees. In the financial year 2001–02 originally planned programme expenditure of £18 million was increased to nearly £40 million. This financial year the original planning framework of £25 million has been increased to £32 million. We also contribute significantly through our share of EC funding.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assistance her Department has provided to help water tankers reach the rural Palestinian population in areas without a networked water system; and if she will make a statement. [77697]

Ms Keeble: In conjunction with our international partners we have made repeated representations to the Israeli authorities to ease access restrictions for water, and other humanitarian supplies. We are also working closely with a number of rural communities to help improve their ability to harvest and store rainwater, and reduce their dependency on imported water.

EC Aid Programme

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on progress reforming the European Commission Aid Programme. [77717]

Clare Short: My Department is focusing its efforts on two broad objectives: improving the overall effectiveness of European Community development assistance and increasing its poverty focus.

We welcome the positive steps that have been taken to reform EC development assistance in the past few years. These are beginning to show results in some areas, but significant improvements are still needed. We are pressing the EC to pursue its reform efforts vigorously in order to implement the November 2000 EC Development Policy, which for the first time makes poverty reduction the central objective of EC development programmes. Reform needs to produce speedier delivery, better impact and more capacity for policy dialogue in the field. Harmonising and simplifying the EC's cumbersome administrative and financial procedures is also a priority, along with work to establish a more coherent policy framework for EC aid.

My Department is also working for agreement that a much greater share of EC aid should be allocated to low income countries where it will have the greatest impact on poverty reduction. In 2000, only 38 per cent. of EC aid was spent in low-income countries compared to 70 per cent. in 1990. This is far too low and indicates that EC aid is having a much less impact than it should on reducing poverty and contributing to building stability and prosperity worldwide.

Latin America

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on the work of her Department in Latin America. [77718]

Clare Short: We are working with the EU, Inter-American Development Bank and other donors to reduce poverty in the region through the promotion of pro-poor growth, the reduction of inequality and improving governance, mainly in Brazil, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru and Bolivia.

We provide support to improve the effectiveness of national development programmes in middle-income countries with major inequality and poverty problems such as Brazil and Peru. In Nicaragua, Honduras and Bolivia, which are Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), we are working with the Governments, civil society and other donors to help with the implementation of national poverty reduction strategies. In Guatemala and El Salvador we are working on health sector reform with the United Nations.

Zimbabwe

Adrian Flook: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development, what is she doing to ensure free and fair distribution of food aid in Zimbabwe. [77719]

Clare Short: DFID, the UN, and other donors in Zimbabwe work in close unison, and share the fundamental principle that humanitarian assistance should be provided on the basis of need alone. Donor funded programmes are closely monitored, and where problems are found or reported, the UN and donors are working together to seek to resolve them through mediation and complaints procedures. In a few cases, food distribution has been suspended until agreements have been reached that allow programmes to resume according to plan. The UN's view is that so far, very little food has been lost or diverted from its intended beneficiaries. We have not had any problems of this nature in our bilateral programme.

There is credible evidence however that food is being distributed or sold by the Government of Zimbabwe through the national Grain Marketing Board in support of political objectives. We deplore this, as well as the obstruction of work of some non-governmental organisations which also appears to be politically motivated.

Kosovo

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on the progress made in offering assistance to Kosovo [77720]

Clare Short: UK assistance to Kosovo began in June 1999, immediately after the NATO intervention. We delivered a £110 million programme of humanitarian assistance that included food supply, shelter, health care, mine clearance, support to the energy and water sectors, small and medium enterprise development and funding for international agencies. We also provided budgetary support.

From 2000, we started to develop a longer term programme to help build the local capacity and institutions to tackle Kosovo's development and transition needs. Our Kosovo Strategy Paper, published in August 2001 covered support for civil and political rights, justice systems, economic restructuring, health care, social policy, public administration and minorities. We spent £12.5 million in 2000–01 and £11.7 million in 2001–02 on technical assistance and budget support; planning figures are £6.5 million in 2002–03 and £8 million in 2003–04 (figures are for Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo).

Our main funding contribution to Kosovo is through our approximately 20 per cent. share of European Community programmes. This amounted to £170 million for 1999–2001 and is estimated at £110 million for 2002–03. We work closely with the EC to improve the effectiveness and impact of its programmes.

We have just completed our first review of the Kosovo strategy. This highlighted that while international aid had been successful so far in meeting humanitarian and reconstruction needs, new challenges were to help the elected provisional institutions of self-government to take on their full responsibilities under the framework agreement agreed with the UN, to create the right environment for growth and reform as levels of international aid decline and to establish mechanisms for Kosovo to access loans from the international financial institutions.

Indonesia

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on levels of UK aid to Indonesia. [77721]

Clare Short: This year my Department will provide some £19.3 million for Indonesia. Of this amount £10 million is grant assistance, supporting governance reform, conflict prevention and reduction, the development of poverty reduction policies and the sustainable management of forest resources. The latter explicitly seeks to protect the interests of poor forest dwellers.

A further £9.1m of concessional loans will be disbursed to meet residual commitments under the now defunct Aid and Trade Provision. In addition £0.2m will be provided to support peace building initiatives by NGOs in strife torn Maluku. My Department will also provide assistance to Indonesians whose livelihoods have been damaged by the Bali bombing.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what discussions her Department has had with the Governments of *(a)* Democratic Republic of Congo, *(b)* Rwanda and *(c)* Uganda regarding the situation in the DRC; and if she will make a statement. [77642]

Clare Short: We maintain a regular and frank dialogue with each of the Governments of DRC, Uganda and Rwanda on the situation in DRC.

We have particularly welcomed the signing of the Pretoria Agreement between DRC and Rwanda and the Luanda Agreement between DRC and Uganda. They are major steps towards peace in the region. The Rwandans have withdrawn their troops from DRC. The Ugandans have completed their withdrawal except for some troops the UN has asked to stay in the troubled town of Bunia. The DRC has taken some steps to arrest leading genocidaires and suggest to that political leadership of the genocidaires that they are no longer

welcome in Kinshahsa but are dragging their feet on agreement to a transitional government including representatives of the armed and unarmed opposition.

The Congo has suffered long enough from kleptocracy and more recently from war. We want to work with all parties in the region and the international community to start to rebuild the DRC so that its people and all those of the region can start to enjoy the benefits of peace.

European Council

Mrs. Spelman: To the Secretary of State for International Development, what discussions she has had with the Prime Minister's office regarding the impact on poor countries of the recent meeting of the European Council. [78668]

Clare Short: None, but the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and enlargement on poor countries has been discussed extensively by relevant Government departments for many months. In July, my department took an initiative to invite representatives from all EU governments to discuss "The impact of CAP reform on Developing Countries". These discussions are continuing with the next meeting in The Hague in January.

It remains clear that without CAP reform, we cannot deliver on the promise we made at Doha to improve trading opportunities for the developing world. The UK will continue to press for a Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the CAP, which should lead to a farming policy which promotes sustainable development, protects and enhances the environment, encourages high standards, guarantees safe food and enables us to fulfil our international commitments.

CDC Capital Partners

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on her role in the recruitment of a new chief executive of CDC Capital Partners. [78666]

Clare Short: The Chief Executive of CDC Group plc is appointed by the Board in accordance with normal company practice. The Chairman of the Board is keeping me informed during the process.

UNHCR

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what her Department's response is to the recent appeal by the UNHCR for funds; and what structures are in place in the event that the UNHCR does not receive the money following its appeal for funds and has to halt some of its aid programmes. [78675]

Clare Short: My Department provides both core, unearmarked, multi-annual funding to UNHCR and responds to specific appeals for particular situations that arise in countries on the basis of an assessment of humanitarian need. We are monitoring the situation closely but have not yet seen fit to provide extra funding to UNHCR, beyond that which is already committed, in response to their recent appeal.

On becoming High Commissioner, Ruud Lubbers initiated a review to reestablish a focus on UNHCR's core protection activities, increase efficiency and address donor concerns about performance. In line with recent improvements in UNHCR's management, my Department has recently concluded negotiations on a four year Institutional Strategy Paper (ISP) with UNHCR. The ISP provides unearmarked funding of $US85m over four years. This is a significant achievement by both sides.

I understand that further funding from other donors has been forthcoming in direct response to the appeal. It is too early to ascertain whether this funding will meet the needs of UNHCR in the short-term. We will continue to monitor developments closely.

Recruitment (Over-50s)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what percentage of new recruits to her Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79309]

Clare Short: 10.5 per cent. of all new permanent recruits to DFID in the two years to 31 March 2002 were aged 50 or over.

Sudanese Refugees

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assistance her Department is providing to Sudanese refugees who have recently fled the Biringi refugee settlement from north-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. [79146]

Clare Short: It is our understanding that these refugees have become entangled in the recent fighting in Ituri province, but are not themselves directly targeted. But the security situation in Ituri is a serious obstacle to effective relief operations as current insecurity severely restricts access. Most operational relief agencies are restricted to the town of Bunia. The nearest UNHCR staff are in Aru, 80km away. Local NGOs have been attempting to access the area in the past few days.

We have not provided direct assistance to this group of people. This year my Department is providing over £10 million in DRC, and £7 million in Sudan, to address humanitarian needs. We also provide core funding to UNHCR.

We continue to press all sides in the conflict to allow access to humanitarian agencies. We are also doing our utmost to help resolve the conflicts in DRC and Sudan that result in these displacements within and across borders.

A press statement issued on 31 October by the Security Council expresses grave concern about the situation in Ituri, and appeals to all parties to show restraint.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment her Department has made of the safety of Sudanese refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [79147]

Clare Short: We have not made any specific assessment of the vulnerability of Sudanese refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Many are in Ituri

Province in the troubled North East of DRC, and are at risk in the current fighting as are the resident Congolese population. The fighting has a strong ethnic component, but we do not believe that for the time being the Sudanese are being specifically targeted.

UNHCR estimate about 75000 Sudanese refugees in DRC. They are vulnerable, and suffer the same levels of abuse, deprivation, and lack of basic services, as the Congolese residents and other refugee groups.

An estimated 17000 Refugees were scattered after an attacks on their camp at Beringi in Ituri province. The UN Security Council on 31/10 called on all parties involved in the fighting in the area to show restraint.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, when she last met Jean Lemierre, President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; and when she next intends to do so. [79148]

Clare Short: I last met the President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development at the DFID on Monday 21 October. Our next currently planned meeting is the EBRD's Annual Meeting in May 2003.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what meetings of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development she has attended; and what meetings of the bank she plans to attend. [79150]

Clare Short: I attended EBRD's Annual Board of Governors meeting in April 1999 and April 2001. I plan to attend the next Annual Meeting in Tashkent in May 2003, when the UK will Chair the Board of Governors. The 2003 Annual Meeting will be an important opportunity to emphasise the need for growth, stability, regional cooperation and essential reforms in Central Asia.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what permanent representation her Department has with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [79149]

Clare Short: The UK Executive Director at the EBRD is a DFID official.

Global Conflict Prevention

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what the criteria are for the disbursement of funds from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool to *(a)* Sierra Leone, *(b)* Uganda, *(c)* Rwanda, *(d)* DRC, *(e)* Ethiopia, *(f)* Sudan, *(g)* Nigeria and *(h)* Angola; how much was allocated from the pool for the purchase of equipment to each in (i) 2001 and (ii) 2002; and if she will make a statement. [79557]

Clare Short: (1) The Africa Conflict Prevention Pool covers priority countries/regions in sub-Saharan Africa and the Global Conflict Pool covers the Rest of the World. The Africa Pool combines a UN peacekeeping budget with a £50 million programme budget in FY 2001–2 and 2002–3. Funds are allocated to support inter-departmentally agreed geographic and thematic priorities, where a joint approach between Departments adds value to the UK's conflict prevention effectiveness.

(2) The Africa Pool's priority areas are: geographic; Sierra Leone, Great Lakes (DRC, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi), Sudan, Angola, Nigeria South Africa and Thematic; Building African Peace Support Capacity, Tackling the Economic and Financial Causes of Conflict and Security Sector Reform.

(3) The table summarises Programme Spend in 2001–2 and initial Allocations in 2002–3, equipment purchases would fall within programme budgets.

	2001–2 Programme Spend	*2002–3 Initial Programme Allocations*
Country/Regional		
1. Sierra Leone	36,139,047	26,529,789
2. Uganda	758,843	753,000
3. Rwanda and Great Lakes	622,520	7,182,700
4. Burundi	1,500,000	690,491
5. Sudan	223,000	399,509
6. Nigeria	514,840	1,028,000
7. Angola	0	239,000
8. South Africa	1,200,000	1,632,000

Note:

* Please note table excludes peacekeeping budget and regional thematic work. IMATT Sierra Leone is included in the Sierra Leone allocation

ENVIRONMENT

Primates

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her Answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 286W, on primate imports, if she will define the categories of breeding, personal, commercial and zoological collections with reference to non-human primates. [79119]

Mr. Morley: The EC CITES Regulations require import permit applicants to state the purpose for which the application is being made using one of the purpose codes given on the reverse of the application form. The Regulation does not offer formal definitions of these codes. However the UK considers that in the case of live primates:

Code B (Breeding) means breeding in captivity primarily for non-commercial purposes.

Code P (Personal) means a long-term personal pet.

Code T (Commercial) means primarily for commercial purposes, including the pet trade.

Code Z (Zoological collections) means scientific / breeding / educational / conservation purposes.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many captive-bred non-human primates were imported into the United Kingdom in the last five years; for what purposes; and if she will make a statement. [79118]

Mr. Morley: Our records show that between 1 January 1997 and 31 October 2002 a total of 25095 captive bred non-human primates were imported into the UK for the following purposes:

Breeding: 76

Personal: 0

Commercial: 448

Bio-medical research: 21113

Zoological collections: 3458

Imports of non-human primates are controlled under EC Regulations implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The Convention allows CITES parties to adopt stricter domestic measures Under this provision the UK decided from 22 May 2001 no longer to issue import permits for commercial trade in live primates.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many primates are owned under a Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 Licence; and for what purposes these animals are owned; [79120]

(2) how many animals are owned under a Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 Licence, broken down by species; [79121]

(3) if she plans to amend the 1984 Schedule to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 to remove animals that have been shown to pose no serious danger to the public. [79122]

Mr. Morley: As local authorities administer the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, details of licensed animals are not held centrally. However, as part of a review to examine the effectiveness of the Act, consultants reported in 2001 that on the basis of a 95 per cent. response from local authorities, 655 primates were then licensed. They did not seek the reason for keeping these animals.

The consultants found a total of 11,878 animals were licensed, categorised as follows:

Category	*Number*
Primates	655
Rodents	14
Carnivores	269
Pinnipeds	3
Elephants	1
Odd-toed Ungulates	20
Even-toed Ungulates	5339
Birds	5232
Reptiles	334
Invertebrates	11

The Even-toed ungulates and birds comprise, for the most part, farmed wild boar and ostrich. A copy of the consultants report can be downloaded by visiting www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/consult/dwaa/index.htm.

The consultants' report has recommended changes to the 1984 Schedule to the Act. We have sought views from the public on all their recommendations, including those on the schedule, and shall be drawing up our own proposals to address the shortcomings identified. Our proposals will be the subject of a further public consultation exercise in due course, as a result of which decisions will be taken as to whether or not the Schedule needs to be altered.

Environmental Information

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what date she expects increased access to environmental information will be available under the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and which *(a)* minister and *(b)* official in her Department has lead responsibility for this matter [79029]

Mr. Meacher: I have just completed public consultation on draft Environmental Information Regulations. Officials are now analysing the comments received. Before preparing a Statutory Instrument of the Regulations to place before Parliament we will also need to take into account developments in Brussels on the negotiations for a Draft Directive on Public Access to Environmental Information. The Regulations will not come into force until 2003 at the earliest.

In answer to the specific questions, I can confirm that *(a)* I am the lead Minister and *(b)* the lead policy Division is Defra Sustainable Development Unit who can be contacted via the Defra website at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/pubaccess/index.htm

Bear Bile

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to discourage the international trade in bear bile. [79045]

Mr. Morley: The CITES Convention imposes strict controls on trade in bears and bear parts but does allow trade in captive bred species. Because of our concerns that this trade could lead to abuses in respect of bear bile, from last year, the UK banned *all* commercial trade in bear (*Ursidae*) bile or gall bladders (irrespective of whether or not they come from captive bred specimens), on the grounds that this trade is likely to be detrimental to the species.

Exotic Birds

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of exotic birds imported into the UK for the last year for which figures are available were dead on arrival. [79033]

Mr. Morley: Records of imported CITES listed birds found dead on arrival are taken from copies of used import permits submitted to the UK CITES Management Authority by HM Customs & Excise. Our records show that during 2001 (the last full year for which records are available) a total of 62 birds (0.92 per cent.) were noted as dead on arrival.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many exotic birds were imported into the UK in the past 12 months; for what purposes they were imported; and from which countries they were imported. [79030]

Mr. Morley: Our records show that from November 2001 to November 2002 a total of 10983 birds listed under the CITES Convention were imported into the UK from 37 different countries for the following purposes:

Breeding: 167

Educational: 18

Personal: 84

Circus & travelling exhibition: 1

Scientific: 47

Commercial: 10662

Zoos: 4

The exporting countries were:

Alderney, Austria, Bahrain, Cameroon, Canada, China, Cyprus, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guernsey, Guinea, Guyana, Iceland, Isle of Man, Ivory Coast, Jersey, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Suriname, Switzerland, Tanzania, UAE, US and Zimbabwe.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many exotic birds were imported into the UK for each year from 1997 to date, broken down into *(a)* wild-caught and *(b)* captive-bred. [79031]

Mr. Morley: There is no CITES definition of the term "exotic bird" but imports of CITES listed birds from outside the EU are controlled under EC CITES Regulations. Our records show that between 1 January 1997 and 31 October 2002 a total of 32346 wild taken and 4901 captive bred CITES listed birds were imported into the UK. The year by year breakdown is:

Year	*Wild taken*	*Captive bred*	*Total*
1997	4800	357	5157
1998	4845	422	5267
1999	4826	411	5237
2000	3995	1551	5546
2001	5565	1114	6679
2002	8315	1046	9361

Imported Birds

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the controls relating to the sale of imported birds in pet shops. [79032]

Mr. Morley: Any bird which is listed on Annex A of the EU regulations relating to the Control of International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora (The CITES regulations) would require a permit for sale from Defra. This would apply whether or not the bird was imported or captive bred within the EU.

The Pet Animals Act 1951 (as amended in 1983) controls the sale of all animals as pets from licensed premises. The 1951 Act requires any person selling pet animals to be licensed by the local authority. Before granting a licence, the authority must satisfy itself that the animals are kept in accommodation that is suitable and clean; that they are supplied with the appropriate food and drink, and are protected from disease and fire. The maximum penalty under the 1951 Act is a fine of £500 and/or three months imprisonment.

The Pet Animals Act 1951 is one of 21 Acts relating to the welfare of domestic and captive animals that are currently reviewing with a view to consolidation and modernisation as part of the proposed Animal Welfare Bill.

Energy Efficiency

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish her Department's review of local authority energy efficiency activity. [77452]

Mr. Morley: Our original intention was to publish the results of this review earlier this year. However, with the publication of the Performance and Innovation Unit's Energy Review in February and the Home Energy Conservation Bill that dealt with many of the key issues for the review, we decided to delay publication until we were able to take account of these.

The Government are now working on its Energy White Paper. This will be a statement of Government energy policy, including energy efficiency. We have decided that the review findings should contribute to the White Paper, which will be published around the turn of the year.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the outcomes to date of the Energy Efficiency Commitment Scheme; what further steps are planned; and what *(a)* consultation on and *(b)* assessment of the scheme (i) has taken place and (ii) is planned. [77593]

Mr. Morley: The Regulator, Ofgem, is responsible for operating the Energy Efficiency Commitment 2002–2005 (EEC) and for providing information to the Secretary of State on progress. Suppliers have been submitting energy efficiency schemes to Ofgem since February 2002 and measures equating to 5.9 TWh in energy savings had been installed or delivered by the end of September. Suppliers will continue to work on these and further schemes to deliver their energy efficiency targets by March 2005.

We consulted widely on the EEC, culminating in the issue of statutory consultation proposals in August 2001. We will consult on any changes to the scheme that may be proposed.

Each supplier is required to report to Ofgem on a quarterly basis and Ofgem must report annually to the Secretary of State on progress with the EEC. Ofgem's first report, on the year ending in March 2003, must be submitted to the Secretary of State by 31 July 2003.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to ensure that *(a)* registered social landlords, *(b)* utility companies and *(c)* Government-run energy efficiency or fuel poverty schemes provide information to energy conservation authorities on the energy efficiency improvements carried out in their area; and if she will make a statement. [77459]

Mr. Meacher: The Government fully support the need for energy conservation authorities to be given information on the improvements made in domestic

energy efficiency in their area by other agencies, to assist their reporting under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.

During the Home Energy Conservation Bill 2001, the Government proposed that registered social landlords should provide information to energy conservation authorities on energy efficiency improvements they had carried out. This proposal came to nothing when my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton Kemptown withdrew this Bill. However, registered social landlords are already required by the Housing Corporation to report on progress against the Decent Homes target, which includes energy efficiency, on a voluntary basis for 2002. The provision of this information will be compulsory from 2003.

Discussions are continuing between gas and electricity suppliers and the Energy Saving Trust to provide this information on a voluntary basis. We hope that these will lead to a voluntary agreement but this is a difficult area, raising complex legal issues. Should no agreement be reached, we will consider using existing legislation to make this a requirement on these companies. But this would not be our preferred route.

The private sector companies managing the Government's energy efficiency scheme are already contractually required to provide this information to authorities on an annual basis.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many local authorities are on course to meet the targets contained in their strategies under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; what measures she proposes to ensure that these targets are met; and if she will make a statement. [77473]

Mr. Meacher: Energy conservation authorities have identified their own targets, based on the measures in their energy conservation reports. The reports show measures that, if implemented, have the potential to achieve an overall improvement of 30 per cent. over twelve years from 1996. These targets are not statutory and it is for authorities, working in partnership with others, to implement the measures in order to meet them.

Authorities report progress towards their targets each year. A list of the latest progress by authorities was placed in the Libraries of the House following my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 19 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 371W.

The overall average reported improvement in the first five years was 8 per cent. It is therefore clear that authorities are not going to make the improvements they originally hoped for. Decisions about the future role of local authorities in local energy efficiency are expected to be covered in the Energy White Paper, which the Government aims to publish early in the new year.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets are in force to reduce the consumption of energy within buildings occupied by central Government; and if she will make a statement. [77448]

Mr. Meacher: The Government plan to use benchmarking of individual buildings against national standards in order to set a new energy consumption target for 2010. This target will require the central Government estate to be performing better than the national average. The analysis required to set a specific target is still underway but it is hoped that it will be in place in the coming year. In the meantime, the estate has an interim target of reducing carbon emissions by an additional 1 per cent. each year relative to 1999–2000.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the local authorities she has contacted regarding underperformance on their targets under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, and indicate how these authorities were identified. [77455]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not contacted any local authorities regarding underperformance against their targets under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to require local authorities to appoint an officer to work on strategies they have drawn up under the Home Conservation Act 1995: and if she will make a statement. [77472]

Mr. Morley: The Government have no plans to require this. It is for local authorities to determine their staffing structure to meet their statutory responsibilities and other priorities.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received concerning the need for statutory targets for local government to be applied to energy conservation in the home. [77417]

Mr. Meacher: The Local Government Association has expressed concern about applying statutory domestic energy efficiency targets to local authorities.

As well as a large amount of correspondence from individuals, we have received the following representations from organisations in support of having statutory targets in the Home Energy Conservation Bill 2001.

Association for the Conservation of Energy
British Energy Efficiency Federation
Blaby Constituency Labour Party
Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency
Daventry District Council
Derbyshire County Council
The Green Party
Friends of the Earth
HECA Partnership for 30 per cent.
Herefordshire Green Party
Hyndburn Borough Council
National Energy Services
Northamptonshire County Council
Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
Oldham Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Preston Borough Council
Assoc. for Environment Conscious Building

Council for Energy Efficient Development
District of Bolsover Labour Group
Draft Proofing Advisory Association
Insulated Render and Cladding Association
Kingspan Insulation
National Association of Loft Insulation Contractors
National Cavity Insulation Assoc.
Oxfordshire County council
Redditch Green Party
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Salford Community Health Council
Socialist Environment and Resources Association
UK Mineral Wool Association
Vent Axia Ltd
Wandsworth Green Party

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will make her next report to Parliament under sections 3(4) of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. [77474]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to make such a report to Parliament.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what representations her Department has received concerning the progress of energy conservation authorities towards meeting the 30 per cent. target in improvement in energy conservation by 2010; [77419]

(2) what representations she has received from *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* others on the ability of local authorities to meet their targets under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. [77468]

Mr. Meacher: There are no statutory requirements for energy conservation authorities to make a 30 per cent. improvement in domestic energy conservation by 2010. However, authorities have prepared reports which show measures that, if implemented, have the potential to achieve an overall improvement of 30 per cent. over twelve years from 1996.

We have not received any representations regarding authorities' progress towards meeting these targets, other than the reports that energy conservation authorities submit each year under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. A summary of these reports is in the House Library.

During the course of the Home Energy Conservation Bill 2001, we received representations from Chichester District Council and the Local Government Association expressing the view that local authorities could not guarantee they would achieve their energy efficiency targets in the domestic housing sector as they had limited powers to ensure savings were made. We also received a number letters from individuals suggesting that making targets statutory would enhance local authorities' ability to achieve their HECA targets.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill & Battle): To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will list the home energy conservation programmes which have *(a)* been delayed and *(b)* failed since 1997. [77413]

Mr. Morley: There have been a large number of home energy conservation projects since 1997, the large majority of which are outside the Government's direct control. These include projects by local authorities, gas and electricity suppliers, the Energy Saving Trust and voluntary organisations.

The Government's main programme in England for tackling fuel poverty through improving energy efficiency is the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, now marketed as the Warm Front Team. The scheme is funded by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs. Warm Front was launched in June 2000 and provides packages of insulation and heating measures up to £2,500 to private sector households, on certain benefits.

For the period June 2000 to June 2002, Warm Front assisted over 400,000 households and spent over £200 million on installing measures. The programme remains on target to reach our PSA requirement of assisting 600,000 vulnerable homes by 2004.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to ensure that the performance figures collected to show local authorities' progress on strategies drawn up under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 can be compared between authorities. [77458]

Mr. Morley: It would be helpful to be able to make better comparisons between comparable authorities' performance. But this could only be achieved by having a single monitoring method. Defra has provided software to all authorities in England, free of charge, to help them monitor improvements in domestic energy efficiency. This is just one of a number of energy efficiency monitoring tools available. We believe that authorities should have the choice of which software package or monitoring method they use. They do, however, have to provide evidence as part of their annual progress reporting that they are using a robust monitoring method.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to meet the target of reducing energy used in the domestic sector by 12.5 per cent. by 2010; and if she will make a statement. [77464]

Mr. Morley: Decisions about targets and policies for reducing energy use in the domestic sector will be covered in the Energy White Paper, which the Government aim to publish around the turn of the year.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to strengthen the powers, duties and funding of local authorities to enable them to play an enhanced role in local energy efficiency activities. [77441]

Mr. Morley: Decisions about the future role of local authorities in local energy efficiency are expected to be covered in the Energy White Paper, which the Government aim to publish around the turn of the year.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what representations her Department received from *(a)* the Treasury and *(b)* other Government Departments (i) prior to and (ii) following the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill; [77405]

(2) what representations her Department received from the Treasury concerning the saving to that Department as a result of the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill; [77408]

(3) what representations her Department has received from the Treasury prior to the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill concerning the cost of a statutory target of 30 per cent. in domestic energy improvement by 2010. [77406]

Mr. Morley: Other Government Departments have been consulted at each stage of the Home Energy Conservation Bill's progress. We have discussed the implications, including those for Government and local authorities, of having a 30 per cent. improvement in domestic energy efficiency as a principal aim in this Bill.

However, it is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to internal opinion and advice or confidential communications between departments.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department received from *(a)* pensioner groups *(b)* Greenpeace, *(c)* the Association for the Conservation of Energy, *(d)* Friends of the Earth, *(e)* Help the Aged and *(f)* Age Concern, (i) prior to and (ii) following the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill. [77402]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has received the following representations regarding the Home Energy Conservation Bill, prior to and following it's withdrawal;

(a) (i) North West Pensioners Association, Warrington Branch have expressed support for the Bill.

(ii) None.

(b) No representations have been received from Greenpeace

(c) (i) The Association for the Conservation of Energy (ACE) have expressed their opposition to the Government's amendments at Committee Stage of the Bill.

(ii) ACE have written to say that the Department's failure to endorse targets in the Bill has sent worrying signals regarding long term commitments in their industry.

(d) (i) Friends of the Earth have expressed support for the Bill and amendment 11a in particular as well as opposing the Government amendments at Committee Stage.

(ii) None

(e) No representations have been received from Help the Aged

(f) No representations have been received from Age Concern.

The Department has also received representations from the HECA Partnership for 30 per cent. (which includes ACE, Friends of the Earth and Help the Aged) expressing opposition to Government amendments at committee stage, urging Ministers to support the Bill, supporting statutory targets in the Bill, discussing the costs of implementing targets and appointing designated HECA officers.

We have also received the minutes of their steering group meeting on October 15, 2001, which record unanimous support for the Bill.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the adequacy of local authorities' progress towards meeting their targets under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; and if she will make a statement; [77453]

(2) if she will list the energy conservation authorities that are on target to meet the requirements of a 30 per cent. improvement in energy conservation by 2010. [77420]

Mr. Morley: There are no statutory requirements for energy conservation authorities to make a 30 per cent. improvement in domestic energy conservation. However, authorities have prepared reports which show measures that, if implemented, have the potential to achieve an overall improvement of 30 per cent. over twelve years from 1996.

Authorities report progress towards their targets each year. A list of the latest progress by authorities was placed in the Libraries of the House following my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) on 19 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 370–371W.

The overall average reported improvement in the first five years was 8 per cent. It is therefore clear that authorities are not going to make the improvements they originally hoped for.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the saving in carbon dioxide emissions would be if energy efficency in the domestic sector was improved by *(a)* five per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent., *(c)* 15 per cent., *(d)* 20 per cent., *(e)* 25 per cent. and *(f)* 30 per cent. by 2010 based upon current levels. [77465]

Mr. Meacher: The estimated reduction in carbon dioxide emissions that would result from the various improvements in domestic energy efficiency by 2010 are set out below.

Energy Efficiency Improvement Relative To 2000 Level	*Projected CO_2 Emissions Reduction In 2010 (Million Tonnes Of Carbon Per Year)*
5%	−1.8
10%	0.4
15%	2.5
20%	4.7
25%	6.9
30%	9.1

Note:
Estimates based on demand growth scenario compatible with DTI Energy Paper 68 projections of energy demand and carbon dioxide emissions, and using underlying rate of improvement in energy efficiency derived from BRE analysis of insulation ownership, and trends in heating efficiency.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the robustness of the targets under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; what plans she has to strengthen them; and if she will make a statement. [77469]

Mr. Meacher: Energy conservation authorities were required to submit their energy conservation reports to the Secretary of State by 30 November 1996. All reports received were evaluated against the requirements of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 and each authority given feedback. It was for authorities to determine their own targets, based on local circumstances. The Secretary of State was not in a position to assess whether these targets were realistic.

If the Home Energy Conservation Bill 2001 had become law, then the Secretary of State would have had a new power to set statutory targets for authorities. We understand that Dr. Turner plans to re-introduce his Bill next session.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received from the Association for Public Health *(a)* prior to and *(b)* following the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill. [77410]

Mr. Morley: The Department has not received any representations on the subject of the Home Energy Conservation Bill from the Association for Public Health either prior to or following the withdrawal of that Bill.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representation her Department has received concerning the future of the Home Energy Conservation Bill. [77449]

Mr. Meacher: We have not received any representations concerning the future of the Home Energy Conservation Bill since that Bill was withdrawn.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the representations submitted to her Department from hon. Members *(a)* in support of and *(b)* against statutory targets prior to the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill. [77404]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has received 25 letters from hon. Members expressing their personal support for targets in the Home Energy Conservation Bill. This is in addition to a large number of letters from MPs covering those from constituents who were in favour of targets in the Bill. We have not received any representations from hon. Members expressing the view that the Bill should not contain targets or forwarding letters from constituents with that view.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what procedures are in place to measure progress made in energy conservation in the home since the implementation of the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000. [77418]

Mr. Meacher: The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 requires energy conservation authorities to prepare reports setting out progress with implementing their energy conservation reports. In 1999–00, authorities were asked, as part of the HECA progress report, whether they had prepared a fuel poverty report. Each year since then, they have been asked to report on progress with its implementation.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received concerning the re-introduction of a Bill aimed at improving domestic energy efficiency. [77409]

Mr. Meacher: Blaby Labour Party has expressed support for the idea of future home energy efficiency legislation. Defra also received a number of letters from individuals which broadly express support for future legislation in this area.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the rules for assessing energy savings of appliances under the Energy Efficiency Commitment Scheme. [77592]

Mr. Morley: The Regulator, Ofgem, is responsible for administering the Energy Efficiency Commitment 2002–2005, including determining what improvement in energy efficiency should be attributed to energy efficiency measures proposed by electricity and gas suppliers. Its procedures for doing so are set our in its "Energy Efficiency Commitment Administration Procedures" published in December 2001 and available at www.ofgem.gov.uk.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received from the Centre for Policy on Ageing *(a)* prior to and *(b)* following the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill. [77411]

Mr. Morley: The Department has not received any representations on the subject of the Home Energy Conservation Bill from the Centre for Policy on Ageing either prior to or following the withdrawal of that Bill.

UNEP Report

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department has received a copy of UNEP's Report, Global Environment Outlook 3, and if she will make a statement. [79082]

Mr. Meacher: My Friend, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, gave a keynote speech at the global launch of the third UNEP Global Environment Outlook (GEO3) Report in London on 22 May. The Secretary of State, and the Defra officials that attended the launch, were given copies of the Report.

The GEO3 Report provides an authoritative assessment that informs our thinking on global sustainable development. Although it does not single out individual countries, it makes clear that action is required by all countries to tackle environmental degradation. The UK Government take the problems

identified by the report extremely seriously and are taking appropriate action in key areas, including biodiversity, climate change, forests and oceans.

For information, the Secretary of State's speech can be found at: http://defraweb/corporate/ministers/speeches/mb230502.htm.

Departmental Review

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* Lord Haskins regarding the review of her Department; and if she will make a statement. [78613]

Margaret Beckett: Lord Haskins has agreed, at my request, to review delivery arrangements and structures to Defra's countryside responsibilities. Lord Haskins will consult widely with Defra stakeholders and those who deliver rural policy. We expect the review to be completed by the summer of 2003.

GM Crops

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 26 September 20002, *Official Report*, column 247W, on GM crops, how many tests for unauthorised genetically modified organisms have been undertaken by the GM Inspectorate; and what proportion of them showed a presence of unauthorised genetically modified organisms. [75838]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 21 October 2002]:* The GM Inspectorate has the authority to carry out testing for the presence of GMOs in two contexts: first, as part of inspection of authorised releases of GMOs into the environment, and, secondly, in support of the audit of seed importers and producers to ensure that non-GM seed stocks are free from unauthorised GM events.

Testing as part of the inspection of authorised releases of GMOs is carried out whenever there is reason to believe that material in addition to that for which consent is held has been released or to confirm the GM status of volunteer plants and bolters. However, the issue of testing of released GMOs is being considered as part of the proposed review inspection and enforcement activities. Since June 2000, there have been 3 tests (comprised of 41 analytical tests) of seed prior to sowing to confirm its purity and 32 tests of volunteers and bolters. None of these tests showed the presence of unauthorised GMOs.

Since June 2000 the GM Inspectorate has carried out a total of 86 audits of seed companies. These audits have monitored the precautions that seed companies have taken as regards the adventitious presence of GM events in seeds. As part of this process a series of tests (18) have been carried out to clarify results presented by seed companies. In no case was the presence of an unauthorised GMO detected.

World Summit

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* is planning to take to consult on the (i) outcomes of the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and (ii) what steps planned by the UK Government to take forward implementation of the outcomes and which individuals or organisations have been or will be consulted as part of the process. [77574]

Mr. Meacher: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has continued to work closely with a wide range of stakeholder groups and my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State and I met with stakeholders in October to discuss the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Officials have subsequently met with stakeholders, in a meeting organised by the BOND Network (British Overseas NGOs for Development).

Ministers are in the process of considering how to take forward the UK's commitments from WSSD at the local, national and international level, building on existing work. We will be launching a major review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy in the new year, which will take into account WSSD commitments. Stakeholders will be consulted in this exercise.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps were taken by her Department to promote the use of the precautionary principle in discussions at the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg; and if she will make a statement on the outcomes of these discussions in taking forward its use in documentation and agreements emerging as a result of the Summit. [77575]

Mr. Meacher: The Plan of Implementation (paragraph 103*(f)*) reaffirms the importance for policy and decision-making of

"the precautionary approach set out in principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development".

It also underlines the importance of principle 15 for the sound management of chemicals and of hazard wastes for the protection of human health and the environment (paragraph 22).

A copy of the Plan of Implementation will be placed in the House Library and can be found at http://www/johannesburgsummit.org/ , along with a copy of the Political Declaration made at Johannesburg.

The United Kingdom and the European Union would also have liked the Plan of Implementation to refer explicitly to the development of the precautionary principle in a number of international legal instruments since Rio. The United Kingdom and the European Union will continue to promote the precautionary principle, as set out in the Rio Declaration and subsequently developed in international law, in taking forward the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit and related work on international sustainable development and policies which impact on health and the environment.

SF6

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of banning the use of SF6 in car tyres and double glazing. [77566]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* At this point in time, the Government have not made an assessment of the impact of banning the use of SF6 in car tyres and insulating glazing in the UK. We expect the European Commission to make a proposal for EU legislation on fluorinated gases in spring 2003. If it transpires that this proposal will include such controls, then we will make an assessment of their impact in the UK.

Correspondence

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Westmoreland and Lonsdale of 18 July, regarding Mr. Clifford Kendal. [79285]

Mr. Morley: My Noble Friend Lord Whitty responded to the hon. Member on 22 October.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Westmoreland and Lonsdale of 17 September, regarding Mr.Trevor Wilson of Cark-in-Cartmel. [79284]

Alun Michael: A response was sent to the hon. Member on 2 November.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will respond to the foot and mouth inquiries. [77304]

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to announce to Parliament her Department's response to the Anderson and Follett Reports. [77134]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* I expect to publish the Government's response to the reports of the Foot and Mouth Disease inquiries before the House prorogues.

Retail Banks

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when she last met the head of agricultural departments of the retail banks and what was discussed; how often she has met the head of the agricultural departments of retail banks in the last 12 months; and how often her predecessor met the head of the agricultural departments of the retail banks. [78487]

Margaret Beckett: I met the heads of the agricultural departments of the retail banks in November 2001.

Public Bodies

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions she has had with her Department's non departmental public bodies; and if she will make a statement. [79730]

Margaret Beckett: I have regular discussions with the heads and officials of Defra's non-departmental public bodies.

European Agriculture

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what meetings she had with her French and German counterparts to discuss European agriculture in the run-up to the EU meeting in Brussels from 24 to 25 October; and what was discussed. [78409]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* I have regular contact with my French and German counterparts, through monthly Agriculture Councils and other meetings. These meetings address the issues facing European agriculture of most interest to the UK, France and Germany, current at the time of the meeting. I last met Frau Kuenast, the German Agriculture Minister on 24 October and subsequently spoke to her on 31 October. I hope to meet my French colleague in the near future.

Bovine TB

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what timetable her Department has set for the future publication of *(a)* DEFRA and *(b)* DEFRA-commissioned research into the epidemiology of bovine TB. [77395]

Mr. Morley: Final reports of Defra-commissioned research into the epidemiology of bovine TB are published on the Defra website once individual projects are complete. Some of the current projects are not scheduled to end until 2005.

In addition the results of the badger culling trial, overseen by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB, are expected to be available in 2005.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to ensure that *(a)* NGOs and *(b)* the public may have access to all up to date bovine TB research funded and programmed by her Department. [77389]

Mr. Morley: Defra's annual Research Requirements Document includes a complete list of all Defra's current research projects, including those on bovine TB. It is available to all on the Defra website. Annual reports of the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB also include summary updates of Defra-funded TB research. These are available on the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are represented on the TB Forum and are made aware of the content of the TB research programme on a regular basis.

A review of the research on bovine TB over the last 5 years will take place in early November. Following the review an output document will be made available to members of the TB Forum and will be available to members of the public via the Defra website.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her Irish counterpart about measures to control bovine tuberculosis. [74862]

Margaret Beckett: In 2001, Defra officials, Defra's independent animal vaccine programme adviser and members of the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) visited the Irish Government's veterinary department and met with researchers to discuss TB control and progress on the Four Area Badger Study. Since the meeting a collaborative research project on badger vaccination has been set up by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency and the University of Dublin.

Dairy Farming

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on dairy farming in Lancashire. [77602]

Mr. Morley: In Lancashire, in common with the rest of the country, the sustainability of many dairy farming enterprises has been adversely affected by low farmgate milk prices. The reasons for these low prices are complex, but include high levels of production earlier in the year combined with the effects of low world prices for dairy commodities. The average farmgate price of milk has recovered from its seasonal low in May, but it is still too low for many dairy farmers to be able to maintain the level of investment required to sustain their businesses.

The prices negotiated between farmers and purchasers, or indeed processors and retailers, are private commercial matters in which the Government cannot get involved. Nevertheless, I do welcome the recent price rises announced by major retailers and dairy processors and hope that these will help alleviate some of the difficulties faced by dairy farmers. The Government can influence the environment in which price negotiations take place through the mechanisms of the dairy CAP and, during the period of lowest prices, we actively supported measures taken in Brussels to support Community markets and encourage exports.

Water Framework Directive

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the basis is of her policy on not participating in river basin pilot studies proposed under the implementation strategy of the Water Framework Directive. [77827]

Mr. Morley: *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The Department, the devolved administrations and the UK Environment Agencies have been, and continue to participate very actively in the development of the Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) of the Water Framework Directive.

This involvement has included leading or co-leading on development of guidance on estuarial and coastal waters, heavily modified water bodies and impact of human activity on surface and groundwater. In addition the UK has participated in all the working groups of the CIS, including the working group on integrated testing in pilot river basins. The UK is also actively involved with current discussions at Community level on the future development of the CIS and aims to play a full part in future work.

Defra and the Environment Agency have not so far proposed any pilot river basin projects for England as part of the CIS. The Environment Agency intends to focus it's efforts on the actual implementation of the Water Framework Directive to ensure initial legal obligations are complied with relating to all river basins. Pilot studies are being undertaken or planned, including in England, to answer specific issues. The experience gained will be fed back to the integrated testing project.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what strategies her Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79297]

Alun Michael: The Department has integrated age into its equal opportunities policies.

In addition, from 1 January 2003 subject to continued organisational need and their continued efficiency staff in Defra will have the opportunity to stay in service beyond age 60 and up to age 65. We are looking to mirror that change in our recruitment procedures.

Municipal Waste

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the percentage of municipal waste that will be recovered in *(a)* 2005, *(b)* 2010 and *(c)* 2015. [77322]

Margaret Beckett: Waste Strategy 2000 sets targets for the recovery of municipal waste of at least 40 per cent. by 2005, 45 per cent. by 2010 and 67 per cent. by 2015. The last Municipal Waste Management Survey shows that in the year 2000–2001, 21 per cent. of municipal waste in England had value recovered from it. Of this, 12 per cent. is recycling and composting, and 9 per cent. energy recovery through incineration.

Local authorities in England already have best value targets for recovery, and statutory targets for recycling and composting; as well as additional funding under the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services block, which includes waste management. Defra's £140 million waste minimisation, recycling and composting fund will also boost local authority performance.

As part of their review of the waste strategy, the Strategy Unit have been considering what additional measures may be needed to achieve these targets. They are expected to publish their report in November.

Mobile Plant Licences

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many mobile plant licences have been issued by the Environment Agency; and how many applications for such licenses are pending; [77325]

(2) what estimate she has made of the average cost to a business of *(a)* obtaining and *(b)* maintaining a mobile plant licence for land remediation; [77327]

(3) what the average time taken to process an application for a mobile plant licence for land remediation is. [77326]

Mr. Meacher: As at September 2002, the Environment Agency had issued 85 mobile plant licences. There are 11 applications pending.

The costs of obtaining a mobile plant licence vary depending on the type of mobile plant licence and the information required. The costs of obtaining the licence can be in the region of £15,000 per licence. These costs include the costs of obtaining the required certificate of technical competence, the administrative costs involved in putting together the required information for the application, and a charge of £1,775 made by the Environment Agency as an application charge for an intermediate capacity mobile plant licence.

Maintenance of the licence can cost in the region of £13,000 per annum. These costs include the Environment Agency's annual subsistence charge of £3,200, and the preparation of risk assessments and working plans for the sites where the mobile plant operates.

The average time taken to process mobile plant applications is 7 months.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of 2001 suckler cow premium payments were outstanding *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in each region on (i) 31 August and (ii) 30 September; and if she will make a statement. [77320]

Margaret Beckett: *(a)* (i) proportion of 2001 Suckler Cow Premium payments outstanding nationally at 31 August was 34.11 per cent.

(b) (i) proportion of 2001 Suckler Cow Premium payments outstanding in each region at 31 August was (see table below.)

Region	*% Of Claims Outstanding At 31 August*	*% Of Claims Outstanding At 30 September*
Bristol	61.79	40.93
Cambridge	37.49	27.35
Carlisle	36.87	20.72
Crewe	12.81	3.83
Exeter	58.45	36.12
Northallerton	18.98	5.32
Nottingham	26.00	18.97
Reading	29.35	13.24
Worcester	20.07	6.35

(a) (ii) proportion of 2001 Suckler Cow Premium payments outstanding nationally at 30 September was 19.20 per cent.

(b) (ii) proportion of 2001 Suckler Cow Premium payments outstanding in each region at 30 September (see table above.)

Member States are required under European legislation to cross-check all animals subject to bovine subsidy against their cattle tracing databases. The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has accordingly cross-checked claimed animals against the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS Cattle Tracing System (CTS)). All cross checks have been completed and RPA has discovered a large number of discrepancies. Many of these arise because of the failure by cattle keepers to notify the CTS when animals are born, die or are moved. This has resulted in RPA being unable to meet the statutory payment deadlines in all cases on bovine schemes, although it is making every effort to ensure all outstanding payments are made as soon as possible. The RPA regrets the delays and the impact on farmer's cash flow, but cannot ignore the discrepancies discovered.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total value was of 2001 Suckler Cow Premiums outstanding at *(a)* 31 August and *(b)* 30 September. [77319]

Margaret Beckett: *(a)* total value of 2001 suckler cow premium 2001 outstanding at 31 August was £5,476,365 compared to payments of £72,834,635.

(b) total value of 2001 suckler cow premium 2001 outstanding at 30 September was £3,290,897 compared to £75,020,103.

Beef Special Premium

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total monetary value is of the claims under *(a)* the beef special premium scheme 2001 and *(b)* the suckler cow premium scheme 2001 that have been refused by the Rural Payments Agency. [77323]

Margaret Beckett: *(a)* estimated total monetary value of claims under the beef special premium scheme 2001 that has been refused by the Rural Payments Agency is £2,020,916 compared to total value of payments due of £107,891,000.

(b) estimated total monetary value of claims under the suckler cow premium scheme 2001 that has been refused by the Rural Payments Agency is £2,232,001 compared to total value of payments due of £78,311,000.

When applicants disagree with the refusal decision it is open to them to provide the RPA with additional information, which they feel, should be taken into account.

Food Waste

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the volume of food waste previously sold to swill feeders which goes to landfill. [77318]

Margaret Beckett: The Animal By-products Order 1999 was amended on 24 May 2001 to introduce a ban on the use of catering waste in swill feeding. It is estimated that approximately 80,000 tonnes per annum of catering waste was being sold to swill feeders at the time the ban came into effect. Following a risk assessment, my Department hopes to consult shortly on amendments to the Order which would allow catering waste to be composted and used on land as a soil conditioner rather than going to landfill.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what her policy is on the development of alternatives to landfill for the disposal of catering food waste; [77230]

(2) what assessment she has made of the risks to *(a)* human and *(b)* animal health of disposing untreated catering food waste in landfill. [77317]

Margaret Beckett: In June, my Department issued the results of a risk assessment on the use of composting to dispose of catering waste and animal by-products. The objective of this study was to determine the risks to public and animal health from the land-spreading of the catering wastes after treatment by composting or in a biogas plant and to compare these with the risks from existing disposal routes.

In summary, the project determined whether current composting processes give a sufficient degree of pathogen destruction such that the risks to humans and animals are acceptably low and the material may be safely spread to land. The composting route for catering waste potentially presents lower risks to grazing animals than disposal through land-fill. This is because composting offers extra control points. First, the raw catering waste could be delivered to enclosed receptions where birds and animals cannot gain access. Second, a no-grazing period could be enforced after application of the compost to land. Following the risk assessment, we hope to consult shortly on amendments to the Animal By-Products Order which would allow catering waste to be composted and used on land as a soil conditioner rather than going to landfill.

Waste

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects waste acceptance criteria to be *(a)* discussed and *(b)* agreed by the EU Council of Ministers. [77321]

Margaret Beckett: The Danish Presidency is expected to put this issue on the agenda for the Environment Council meeting on 9–10 December. If agreement is not reached at that meeting, the issue will revert to the Commission for a decision.

TSE Tests

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the United Kingdom has not submitted to the European Commission its programme for TSE tests; and when she intends to submit it. [78363]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The TSE programme was not submitted as a result of an oversight and a subsequent misunderstanding with the Commission. The programme was submitted on 22 October when we asked the Commission to reconsider making an EU contribution.

Badgers

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her reasons for issuing a licence for the removal and slaughter of badgers at Saltdean, East Sussex. [74909]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 October 2002]:* Defra received an application for a licence under Section 10 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, to prevent badgers causing serious damage to property.

We investigated the case extremely carefully, and considered the full range of options for addressing the problem. In addition to this, we sought to involve groups associated with animal welfare issues, even though the Act does not oblige us to do so.

The decision to grant a licence for the humane dispatch of the badgers was taken with great reluctance, only after it appeared that all other avenues had been exhausted and in the exceptional circumstances of this case. In dealing with any licence applications we always seek to avoid the need to harm badgers. This was an extreme case where no other option had been identified.

On October 14 trapping work was suspended to allow local interest groups and residents to have a further opportunity to come to a suitable arrangement.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the Four Area Badger Study carried out by the Republic of Ireland. [74865]

Margaret Beckett: The Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) is monitoring the Four Area Badger Study. Members of the ISG, Defra officials and Defra's independent animal vaccine programme adviser visited some of the Four Area Badger Study sites during their visit to Ireland in 2001.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the East Offaly Badger Removal Project. [74866]

Margaret Beckett: The East Offaly badger removal project was assessed in the "Krebs" Report on Bovine Tuberculosis in Cattle and Badgers, published in 1997. Based on many of the recommendations in the Krebs report, the Government have put in place a wide-ranging research programme into cattle TB. The Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG), has advised on this research programme and in so doing considered previous badger removal operations including the East Offaly project.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to receive the report of the Risk Assessment Group which she established to study illegal meat imports. [77356]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The risk assessment is being carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA). The work commenced in March 2002 and we expect the report to be published later this year.

Preliminary results are currently being subjected to peer review and quality assurance procedures. The full results and final report will be published when this process is complete.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to amend the financial provision for the Countryside Agency. [78912]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The budget for the Countryside Agency is agreed as part of the corporate planning process, which is currently underway.

Bio-fuels

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the consequences for the Government's policy on bio-fuels of the collapse of ARBRE Energy. [76842]

Margaret Beckett: The Government take the future of energy from biomass very seriously and considers that energy crops have the potential to make a significant contribution to renewable energy and climate change targets. We are providing support to develop the sector through the Bio-energy Capital Grants Scheme and the Energy Crops Scheme. The funding available from the Bio-energy Capital Grants Scheme could deliver about 100MW of generating capacity. Discussions are continuing on the future of ARBRE and there are a number of lessons from the project that can be applied to future high efficiency biomass plants. The project has shown that short rotation coppice can be established and grown at the scale required to form an important element of the fuel supply. Useful information has been learned on improving yields, the use of varieties to minimise pest and disease impact and on harvesting technology.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about increasing the tax incentives offered to producers of bio-fuels; and if she will make a statement. [79235]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* I am in regular contact with Treasury Ministers to discuss a whole range of matters related to energy and environmental policy. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets regularly with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a wide range of matters that affect the business of the Department. As with all tax matters, decisions on tax incentives rest with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

ARBRE Energy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money is owed to her Department by ARBRE Energy. [76846]

Margaret Beckett: No money is owed to my Department by ARBRE Energy.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number of farmers who were assigned grants made by her Department to ARBRE Energy in respect of the Eggborough Power Station and *(b)* the impact on those farm businesses of moves by her Department to recover grants paid. [76845]

Margaret Beckett: Under the Energy Crops Scheme and the Woodland Grant Scheme planting grants are payable to growers. In the case of crops to provide fuel for the ARBRE power station growers assigned the payments to ARBRE Energy and this Department and the Forestry Commission were asked to make the payments to the third party. 12 growers qualified for grants to plant crops to provide fuel for ARBRE under the Energy Crops Scheme. A further 46 growers qualified for grants under the Woodland Grants Scheme. The Energy Crops Scheme requires that crops are used for the production of energy but it is too early to consider any recovery of grant as discussions are continuing on the future of ARBRE. Should it become necessary the Department will work closely with growers to access one of the alternative energy markets.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money her Department has paid in grants, and under which schemes, to ARBRE Energy in respect of the wood-burning power station at Eggborough, Selby. [76843]

Margaret Beckett: Grants to plant crops to provide fuel supply for the ARBRE project have been paid to ARBRE Energy as follows:

Energy Crops Scheme per cent. £184,580
Woodland Grant Scheme per cent. £980,994

Of the £184,580 two payable orders totalling £31,290 have yet to be cashed.

A further £97,090 remains payable to Arbre Energy under assignments made by growers. Following the liquidation, we were asked to delay these two payments until the growers in question had opportunity to discuss cancellation of the assignments with the liquidator. I hope that this will be resolved shortly.

Fly Tipping

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what evidence has been collected into the difficulties faced by local authorities in dealing with fly tipping; and if he will make a statement; [78083]

(2) what representation he has received to strengthen the legal powers available in local authorities to deal with fly tipping; and if he will make a statement. [78085]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Local Government Association produced a report which was presented to the fly tipping forum at the beginning of 2002. This paper was based on a survey of local authorities and provided information on levels of fly tipping within each local authority and the enforcement action taken.

The paper also outlined a number of suggestions for increasing local authorities' powers in relation to waste management and fly tipping. As a result, the Government will be amending shortly the duty of care legislation to allow local authorities to be able to serve notice on businesses which will require them to supply

that authority with their waste transfer notes. Waste transfer notes are required to be kept under Section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

A404

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 644W, on the A404, if she will place in the Library copies of the advice received from lawyers; and if she will make a statement on the footpath Bisham 9. [79718]

Alun Michael: We have been continuing correspondence with Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council and the Ramblers Association about the proposed diversion of footpath Bisham No. 9. On the information now before me, I am satisfied that the drafting of the necessary orders are justified. These orders will be published shortly.

Feta Cheese

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will press for a review of the Protected Designation of Origin procedure affecting non-generic products; and if she will make a statement on the recent decision in respect of feta cheese. [77832]

Mr. Morley: The UK has consistently opposed the registration of feta cheese as an EU protected food name on the grounds that we believed that the name "feta" had become a generic product and so not eligible for protection. However, in the absence of a contrary decision by the Council, feta was registered by the Commission as a protected food name on 15 October. While disappointed with this particular outcome, we are satisfied in general with the protected food name scheme and the procedures for registration of products. The scheme was highlighted by the Curry Commission Report on the Future of Farming Food as being a useful opportunity for UK producers to protect the character of their product and secure a premium price for it.

Agri-environment Schemes

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in terms of how much paperwork is involved in the agri-scheme; how easy it will be to access, what account the scheme will take of work already done; how it will be funded; and how it will be policed. [79245]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Defra is working with stakeholders on a fundamental review of agri-environment schemes. A first round of public consultation was held earlier this year and a second round of consultation will begin shortly. A key objective of the review is to streamline the administration of the schemes, making full use of modern technology.

One strand of the review is based on the recommendation by the Policy Commission on the Future of Food and Farming that the current schemes should be complemented by a new, simple entry-level scheme, open to as many farms in England as possible. Defra is designing a pilot for such a scheme which will be launched in four areas next year. The scheme would reward positive management of existing features as well as enhancement. Subject to success of the pilot, it is hoped that the new scheme could be rolled out nationally in 2005.

Like the existing schemes, it would be co-financed from EU and national funds and would include compliance checks on a percentage of applicants in accordance with EU requirements.

Modulation

Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with EU farm Ministers about the equalization of farm modulation across the EU; and if she will make a statement. [79232]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The government support the European Commission's proposal to introduce compulsory modulation across the European Union, although our support will depend on the detail of its implementation. This issue was discussed at the October 2002 Agriculture Council and I have raised it in various meetings with European Agriculture Ministers and with Commissioner Fischler.

Sellafield

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place full versions of the two DEFRA reports into the economic viability of Sellafield in the Library. [77547]

Margaret Beckett: Two reports about the economic case for the Sellafield MOX plant, by PA Consulting and AD Little, were published by Ministers for consultation in 1999 and 2001. The published versions omitted some commercially confidential information.

In an arbitration under the terms of the OSPAR Convention, which was heard in The Hague from 21 to 25 October, Ireland is seeking full versions of the reports. The Government maintains that it is entitled to withhold commercially confidential information from the published versions of the two reports and that this did not significantly affect the ability of consultees to comment on the economic case for the plant.

The arbitral tribunal will deliver its award in due course.

GM Crops

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will add the six figure grid references for the 2001–02 National Seed Listing Trials planted under 00/R33/6 to the public register. [79736]

Mr. Meacher: The full 6 figure grid references for these sites will be available on the public register by the 8 November.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which of the National Seed Listing trials for GM crops planted between Autumn 2001 and Spring 2002 were completed. [79738]

Mr. Meacher: National List tests and trials for GM crops sown at four sites between Autumn 2001 and Spring 2002 were completed satisfactorily. These are shown in the table:

Type of Test or Trial	*Location*
Distinctness Uniformity and Stability	Sand Hutton, Yorkshire
Value for Cultivation and Use	Thorganby, Lincolnshire
	Hinton Waldrist, Oxfordshire
	Udny, Aberdeenshire

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what dates Ministers in her Department have held meetings with members and officials of the United States Administration since 8 June 2001; where each meeting was held; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which United States Administration department attended each meeting; and which members and officials from the United States Administration attended each of these meetings. [78151]

Margaret Beckett: Defra Ministers have met the following US Administration members and officials since 8 June 2001:

Margaret Beckett: *Thursday 1 November 2001, London*

Governor Christine Todd-Whitman, Environmental Protection Agency

Tuesday 4 December 2001, Washington DC

Ambassador Bob Zoellick, USTR;

Senator Joseph Lieberman, Senate Environment & Public Works Committee;

Paula Dobrianski, Under Secretary, State Department;

Senator Jeff Bingaman, Chair Senate Energy & national Resources Committee;

Senator James Jeffords, Chair Senate Environment & Public Works Committee;

Senator Chuck Hagel, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Wednesday 5 December 2001, Washington DC

Gary Edson, National Economic Council;

Governor Christine Todd-Whitman, Environmental Protection Agency;

Ann Veneman, Agriculture Secretary, US Department of Agriculture;

Senator Tom Harkin, Chair Senate Agriculture Committee;

Senator Richard Luger, Senate Agriculture Committee;

Jim Connaughton, Chair White House Council for Environment Quality;

Andrew Natsios, USAID;

Thursday 11 April 2002, Washington DC

Ian Johnson, Environmental & Social Sustainable Development Department;

Ann Veneman, Agriculture Secretary, US Department of Agriculture;

Al Larson, Under Secretary for Economic, Business & Agriculture Affairs, US State Department;

Michael Meacher: *Thursday 1 November 2001, London*

Governor Christine Todd-Whitman, Environmental Protection Agency

Lord Whitty: *Wednesday 19 June 2001, London*

Dr. J B Penn, Under Secretary, US Department of Agriculture

Alun Michael and Elliott Morley have not held any meetings with members or officials of the United States Administration.

In addition, Defra Ministers engage with US Administration members in numerous international fora.

Export Refunds

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the expenditure within the EU on the subsidising of exports of surplus agricultural production for which figures are available in the last year; and how much of the total comes from *(a)* EU and *(b)* national funding. [79258]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The European Union spent 3.4 billion euro on export refunds in its 2001 financial year. So far as we are aware, no member state uses national funds for this purpose.

Food Costs

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the additional weekly expenditure for the average family in purchasing food in consequence of the difference between EU and world prices in the most recent annual period for which figures are available. [79259]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* In 2000 the CAP is estimated to have increased the cost of food for a notional UK family of four by £4–5 per week. Taking account of the additional cost borne by taxpayers the figure rises to £8–9 per week.

Brazilian Mahogany

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government are taking to stop imports of Brazilian mahogany. [79000]

Mr. Morley: International trade in Brazilian mahogany is controlled under the terms of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to which the UK is a party. Brazilian big leaf mahogany is listed in Appendix III of the Convention which requires that mahogany exported must have been acquired in accordance with the national laws for the protection of fauna and flora. Where importers of mahogany present an export permit issued by the Management Authority in Brazil confirming that the mahogany has been legally acquired, imports are allowed.

However, we are concerned about the current position with relation to mahogany imports from Brazil. A proposal is currently under discussion at the Conference of the CITES Parties to list Brazilian big leaf mahogany on Appendix II. The UK along with the rest of the European Union is supporting this proposal which would allow importing states to reach their own scientific judgement as to the sustainability of the trade.

Flood Insurance

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in which areas of the country flood insurance cover is not available; and if she will make a statement. [76281]

Mr. Morley: The Association of British Insurers have stated that all properties defended to at least a standard of 1.3 per cent. (1 in 75) annual probability, should be able to obtain cover. Properties currently protected to a lesser extent, but where defences to meet the above standard are planned for the next 5 years, should also be able to get cover. The ABI have assured us that undefended properties or "exceptional cases" will be assessed on an individual basis and consideration given as to whether some form of insurance cover can be given. Many of the properties which the ABI estimate will not be able to obtain cover, have never have been able to get flood insurance.

The decision to move away from the existing agreement means that, in the majority of cases, people can and should shop around for the best deal. However, it must be recognised that insurance companies need to take a commercial decision as to what risk they will cover and on what terms. It is impossible to make a generalisation about areas where flood cover will be unavailable as in a competitive market as what is unacceptable to one company may well be acceptable to another.

Measuring the Quality of Life Report

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will publish their response to the Environmental Audit Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2001–02, Measuring the Quality of Life: The 2001 Sustainable Development Headline Indicators. [80314]

Mr. Meacher: I am pleased to announce that I have today, laid in the libraries of both Houses, copies of the Government's response to the Environmental Audit Committee's Fourth Report of the 2001–2002 session, "Measuring the Quality of Life: The 2001 Sustainable Development Headline Indicators".

The Government's response reinforces our commitment to reporting progress towards sustainable development, particularly through a set of headline indicators. In our sustainable development strategy "A better quality of life", published in 1999, we envisaged a full review of both the strategy and all the indicators after five years, which we will aim to complete by the end of 2004.

GM Maize

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what opinions the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment has received from the Advisory Committee on Feedingstuffs (ACAF) on the dossier of evidence presented by Aventis in support of its application for marketing consent for T25 GM maize, with particular reference to their opinion on the chicken feeding study; and if she will place a copy of ACAF's opinion in respect of *(a)* the whole dossier and *(b)* the chicken feeding study in the Library. [4932]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* At the request of the department, The Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) has, since November 2000, been considering the criticisms of the safety of Aventis' (formerly AgrEvo and now Bayer Cropscience) GM maize, T25, which has been raised at the hearing into the addition of CHARDON LL (a variety of T25) to the national list of seeds. ACRE subsequently requested advice from ACAF on the animal feed aspects of the criticisms.

AgrEvo applied in 1995 through the French authorities for approval under EU directive 90/220 to place its GM T25 maize on the European market for cultivation and use as animal feed. In June 1995 France circulated the dossier to the other member states with the recommendation that T25 maize be given approval. After due consideration European Union member states approved the marketing of T25 maize in 1998. As part of this process ACRE considered the French opinion and dossier supporting the application and gave its advice to the government in June 1996. This was prior to the formation of ACAF. The chicken feeding study was not part of the original dossier submitted in 1996 and so was not considered by ACRE. A summary of the study was circulated by the French in 1997 as supplementary information on the nutritional qualities of the maize. The French authorities were of the view that the study did not add any significant new information to the dossier. Officials in MAFF considered the study, but as it was a nutritional rather than a safety study, it was not sent to ACRE.

In reconsidering aspects of the T25 maize dossier ACRE has asked ACAF to look at the available data and advise on the substance of the criticisms raised at the CHARDONLL hearing in relation to animal feed and in particular the mortality rate in the chicken study. The growth rates in the two groups were broadly equivalent, but of the 140 fed T25 maize grain, 10 chicks (7 per cent.) died, whereas only 5 of the 140 (3.5 per cent.) died in the control group. In this type of experiment up to 8 per cent. would be expected to die. So the mortality rate is within the expected range. The question raised in the CHARDONLL is whether this is of concern and worthy of further investigation.

A copy of the letter of 5 September 2001 from ACAF to ACRE setting out the committee's views on the whole dossier and the chicken feeding study has been placed in the Library. A copy is also on the public register held by my Department in Ashdown House

In summary, ACAF is satisfied that, on the basis of the information presented by AgroEvo, there is nothing to indicate that T25 maize grain or its products pose any more risk to animals or humans than non-GM maize varieties if used in animal feed. I have asked ACAF for their reasons for this conclusion. However, ACAF advised ACRE that the data in the dossier are not sufficient to conclude at this stage, that T25 silage (rather than grain) is substantially equivalent to other maize varieties. Although it is unlikely that T25 maize silage is unsafe to feed to animals, its equivalence should

be confirmed. The UK regulatory authority has subsequently written to Aventis to request further data on the composition of T25 silage.

ACRE has given preliminary advice that nothing has been raised that warrants taking immediate action under the directive to withdraw T25 maize from the market. ACRE will shortly be issuing its advice on concerns raised during the CHARDON LL hearing, including criticisms of the chicken feeding study. This advice will also include ACRE's response to points raised at its T25 maize open hearing held in February 2002. At their hearing the Committee, in conjunction with ACAF, invited a number of witnesses and experts including Dr. Kestin and Dr. Knowles. Guided by the evidence taken at this meeting, any subsequent comments on the evidence from the public and the background information that is already available, ACRE will advise Ministers further on the validity of the T25 risk assessment.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* shelters, *(b)* bedsits and *(c)* houses in multiple occupation were registered as unfit for habitation in each year since 1997. [77421]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received concerning the adequacy of *(a)* safety standards, *(b)* energy efficiency standards and *(c)* furnishing and fixture standard regulations applied to homes of multiple occupancy; and if she will make a statement [77414]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister receives regular correspondence from Members of Parliament, the public, local authorities, landlords, tenants, professional and other interested bodies about the adequacy of the current standards applying to houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), including those relating to safety standards, energy efficiency standards and furnishings and fixtures. The Government is committed to raising standards in such properties, which is why we will introduce legislation, as soon as parliamentary time permits, to require local authorities to licence HMOs which pose the greatest risk to the health and safety of their occupiers in their areas.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Devolution Cases

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate General, how many devolution cases have proceeded up to the Privy Council; and in what percentage of those she has intervened. [77258]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* Eleven cases have proceeded to the Privy Council and I have intervened in seven.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate General, what is the total sum of court expenses incurred as result of her intervention in devolution cases since the inception of her Office. [77259]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The question of expenses in a court action is a matter for the discretion of the court and any expenses awarded to or against a party may be referred to the auditor of court. Since the inception of my Office, no expenses have been awarded to or against the Advocate-General in devolution cases in which I have intervened.

Budgetary Provision

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate General, what the *(a)* total cost and *(b)* budget provision for her Office has been each year since its inception. [77260]

Advocate-General *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* I refer to the answer I previously gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) for the period from the inception of my Office until 2000–01, in *Official Report*, 25 January 2002, column 1127W The figure for 2001–02, in respect of identifiable costs of staff and related administration for my Office, was £1,431,426. Approximately half of the costs of the Office relates to work on litigation and advisory work, including the preparation of Bills, carried out by lawyers from the Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General on behalf of Government Departments other than the Advocate-General. These costs were met from within the overall budget of the Scotland Office.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General, how many devolution cases have been intimated to her since the inception of her Office. [77257]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* Devolution issues are intimated to me in accordance with the Scotland Act 1998 as devolution minutes. There may be more than one minute intimated in the course of a case. As at 6 November 2002, approximately 1746 minutes were intimated to me in connection with a total of 1575 cases.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate General, in how many devolution cases she has intervened since the inception of her Office. [77256]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* I have intervened in 24 cases since the creation of my office in May 1999.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Websites

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if she will list the website links associated with her Department, including sites now dormant or closed, and indicating whether they are live, dormant or closed; what the start-up costs were for each site listed; what the operating costs were in each year since start up for each site; which company hosted each site; what assessment takes place for each site; which company does the assessment; if she will place the assessment reports in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [75592]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office website is www.scottishsecretary.gov.uk and was set up by departmental staff. Identifiable costs for the Scotland Office were £2,700. Operating costs for the site are currently estimated at £2,000 per year. The site is hosted by Scotland On-Line.

My department is also responsible for the Friends of Scotland website (www.friendsofscotland.gov.uk), which was established on 23 July 2002. Start-up costs were £62,623. Details of annual operating costs are not yet available but maintenance and development costs to date are £4,711. The site is hosted by Ed Net.

Both of these sites are live. My department also set up an initial Friends of Scotland website (www.friendsofscotland.org.uk) earlier this year. This site was set up within the department and the start-up and operating costs were minimal. The site was hosted by Scotland On-Line and is now closed.

No external companies have been commissioned to provide an assessment of the department's websites. The content and use of the sites is kept under review within the department.

Friends of Scotland

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if she will list the members of the Friends of Scotland initiative, broken down by their country of residence. [79561]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to my answers of 29 October. Up to 6 November 2002, the Scotland Office had recruited a total of 142 Friends of Scotland (this figure is updated on a monthly basis).

The names of individual Friends cannot be disclosed without their permission.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what discussions she has had with Ofgem about the state of preparedness of *(a)* electricity generation and *(b)* electricity distribution companies to cope with emergencies arising from severe weather conditions. [78554]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is in regular contact with Ofgem regarding aspects of the resilience of the electricity generation, transmission and distribution system. In particular Ofgem participated in the steering group for a study of the emergency preparedness of the transmission and distribution systems which we published in May. Following Sunday's storms I announced that we would be testing the conclusions of this study, which were generally positive, against the actual response in difficult conditions. I have asked for a review of how companies performed and for recommendations to help them ensure that future supplies to consumers are not affected to the same extent. Ofgem will be fully involved in the review.

Council for Science and Technology

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what arrangements have been made for carrying out a quinquennial review of the Council for Science and Technology. [80316]

Ms Hewitt: The quinquennial review of the Council for Science and Technology was launched on 19 August. The Science and Technology Select Committee was informed in advance and sent copies of a consultation letter which was sent out to learned societies and other stakeholders such as Universities UK, the CBI and the Engineering Employers Federation. The consultation letter was also placed on the web (http://www.ost.gov.uk/policy/q—review.htm).

The first stage of the review, which addressed whether the CST is still needed, has recommended that it should continue in being, but that steps must be taken to make it more effective. The Government have accepted this recommendation. The second stage of the review will look at how the CST might best be used in future.

The consultation will continue until 17 November.

Petroleum Industry

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what figures she collates on how many UK-based petroleum geologists and geophysicists are working in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* abroad. [79162]

Mr. Wilson: My Department does not collate such figures. However, under a recent Government/industry PILOT initiative, a questionnaire on UK Continental Shelf exploration activity is being circulated to all UKCS exploration managers. Within this, companies are being asked how many geoscientists are currently working for their organisation on the UKCS and how this compares with 3 years ago. The survey will conclude by December 2002, and the results will then be analysed and presented to PILOT in due course.

South East England Development Agency

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what the planned expenditure for the South East England Development Agency on *(a)* corporate entertainment and *(b)* conferences was during the financial year 2002–03. [77858]

Alan Johnson: *(a)* As part of SEEDA's marketing budget for 2002–03, £12,000 is provided for events hosted by the Chairman and / or the Board and £13,000 for other open consultation and communication events.

(b) SEEDA itself does not host conferences, but may contribute to cost of holding events which relate to economic development and other related purposes. The budget for SEEDA staff attending conferences and events is £49,000.

Motor Sport

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what progress she has made in promoting energy efficiency of motor vehicles through environmentally friendly motor sport; [79854]

(2) what action she has taken to encourage development of an environmentally friendly specification or formula for motor sport. [79853]

Mr. Wilson: I am pleased to say that the Department and four Regional Development Agencies (East Midlands, South East England, East of England, and West Midlands) jointly funded a major industry-led initiative called Energy Efficient MotorSport (EEMS). An EEMS working group was established, consisting of a number of companies and individuals with relevant interest and expertise which resulted in a feasibility study published in August 2002, which was commissioned through the Motorsport Industry Association (MIA).

The aim of the study was to assess the role that motorsport could play in the promotion and development of energy efficiency automotive technologies. A follow up EEMS presentation was recently made by the MIA to the world governing body of motorsport to explore how the proposals of the study could be demonstrated in a motor racing context. DTI, RDAs and other involved in the EEMS initiative are planning an industry showcase event and other activities to encourage industry to implement its findings.

In addition, the DTI led Foresight Vehicle programme, the UK's national automotive R & D programme, continue to support collaborative R & D in range of areas including environmental performance (e.g. fuel efficiency, emissions, light weight materials).

Motor Industry (Licensing)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what plans she has to introduce a system of licensing for *(a)* independent motor vehicle garages and *(b)* franchised motor dealers; and if she will make a statement. [78589]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have no plans at present to introduce a system of licensing for garages or motor dealers. Car buyers have the same rights as all consumers to expect that the goods they buy are of satisfactory quality and as described. With regard to car servicing and repair, my Department is working closely with the industry and other stakeholders to develop an independent national voluntary scheme to enable consumers to identify garages across the sector which are committed to delivering consistent minimum standards of customer service.

Trading Standards

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how many successful prosecutions have been made by local authority trading standards departments against licensees or landlords for delivering short measures in each of the last five years. [77570]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As a general rule, local authorities do not currently initiate prosecutions for short measure draught beer unless the deficiency exceeds 10 per cent. The Department is aware of 13 successful prosecutions over the last five tax years:

Year	*1997–8*	*1998–9*	*1999–2000*	*2000–1*	*2001–2*
Prosecutions	9	2	1	1	0

Mining (Compensation)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, when her Department and the Claimant Solicitor's Steering Group expect to agree a dust figure for the occupation of Strata Engineer in respect of relevant mining compensation claims. [78507]

Mr. Wilson: Dust factors for jobs not explicitly covered in the Claims Handling Agreement (CHA), like that of Strata Engineer, are decided by the Dust Reference Panel, experts who are jointly instructed by the DTI and the Solicitors' Co-ordinating Group (CG).

The Department's claims handlers, IRISC, have only one claim that is currently outstanding for a Strata Engineer. This case will become the subject of an individual referral to the Dust Reference Panel (DRP).

The DRP are currently working with the Department and the Solicitors' Co-ordinating Group to produce guidance that will aid the referral of individual cases to the DRP. This will be issued shortly and individual cases can then be referred when the claimants' solicitor and IRISC have assembled the necessary evidence, in accordance with the guidance.

Patents (Biotechnology Inventions)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what assessment he has made of whether the patents system as it applies to biotechnology inventions continues to operate in the public interest; and if he will make a statement. [77876]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is important to ensure that the patent system in this rapidly developing area continues to operate in the public interest. The Department is commissioning a study on the impact which current patenting practice in the field of genetics has on research and competitiveness in the UK. The Department of Health is conducting a study on Intellectual Property generally and the NHS. In addition, the report published in September of the independent Commission on Intellectual Property Rights, set up by right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, makes recommendations in this area in terms of the impact on developing countries. The Government are currently considering these recommendations.

Coal Industry

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what proposals her Department has for investment aid for the UK coal industry. [78451]

Mr. Wilson: We are currently consulting on the case for an investment aid scheme for the UK coal industry. The consultation document is available via the DTI website at http://www2.dti.gov.uk/support/coal/.

The deadline for comments is 15 November 2002.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what the criteria are for applying the temporary operating aid scheme for the UK coal industry. [78452]

Mr. Wilson: The general criteria for the UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme, as approved by the European Commission in November 2000, are available on the DTI website at www.dti.gov.uk/support/coal

We are also seeking Commission's approval for a targeted extension of the Scheme to the end of this year. The criteria for this extension can be found at http://www2.dti.gov.uk/support/coal/ukcoas ext.pdf

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what plans she has to aid the UK coal industry when the temporary operating aid scheme ends. [78453]

Mr. Wilson: The new European coal State aid regulation which came into force on 24 July 2002 provides us with the flexibility to pay investment aid for pits that have a viable future. This would allow us to pay up to 30 per cent. of the total costs of the relevant investment project. We are currently consulting on the case for introducing a scheme in the UK to make use of this flexibility.

Photovoltaics

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what incentives are available to encourage the installation of photovoltaic cells in *(a)* domestic and *(b)* non-domestic premises. [78175]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The £20 million First Phase of the Major Photovoltaic Demonstration Programme offers grants of 50 per cent. on small scale domestic solar panel arrays installed by accredited companies. Grants are also available for larger scale non-domestic systems. The programme has been running now for 6 months and has had 78 successful applications accounting for around £2 million in grants.

By the end of the three year first phase we hope to have installed PV systems on 3000 domestic roofs and 140 medium and large public and commercial buildings.

VAT reductions are also available for professionally installed solar panels.

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will introduce *(a)* fixed net metering, *(b)* a feed in tariff and *(c)* loans for those wanting to install a solar photovoltaic system. [78141]

Mr. Wilson: *(a)* Fixed net metering is a matter for individual suppliers, as its introduction involves them incurring costs. However, initiatives to promote its uptake are under consideration within DTI, e.g. under the Distributed Generation Co-ordinating Group.

(b) The Renewables Obligation came into force in April of this year. This is considered a more market-driven approach than a feed-in tariff, and so compatible with a liberalised, competitive market.

(c) Feed-in tariffs and low interest loans are features of the German Government's PV support programme, whereas we have chosen the capital grant route, which is more akin to the Japanese approach. The £20 million first phase of the Major Photovoltaic Demonstration programme, launched in March this year, offers grants averaging 50 per cent. for small and large-scale PV installations. It has been running now for 6 months and has had 78 successful applications accounting for around £2 million in grants. By the end of the three year first phase we hope to have installed PV systems on 3000 domestic roofs and 140 medium and large public and commercial buildings.

Manufacturing (North–West)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how many people were employed in the manufacturing sector in the north-west in each of the last five years. [79576]

Alan Johnson: The numbers of people employed in manufacturing in the north-west during each of the last five years for which data is available from the Office of National Statistics are as follows:

Year	
1996	529,351
1997	532,200
1998	529,604
1999	514,114
2000	499,020

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what support and assistance she is providing to the manufacturing sector in the north-west. [79575]

Alan Johnson: Much of the work undertaken in the north-west is underpinned by our recently published Manufacturing Strategy in which we have identified several key pillars to assist manufacturing companies in fulfilling their potential in the UK.

The North West Development Agency (NWDA) together with regional partners are charged with taking forward Government support and assistance in the north-west. The NWDA is promoting and sharing best practice through industry cluster programmes for the aerospace, food & drink and chemicals sectors and others. NWDA delivers the supply chain programme which helps and encourages north-west businesses to use north-west suppliers as well as assisting small businesses devise recovery plans should their main customer reduce production or move from the area.

We have established the UK's first Regional Centre for Manufacturing Excellence in Manchester. The Centre provides the DTI's Manufacturing Advisory Service—the practical, hands-on support manufacturers need. Two Innovative Manufacturing Research Centres are based in the University of Liverpool, making a significant contribution to the global competitiveness of UK manufacturing.

Skills and Employment issues are recognised amongst other issues as an important factor in improving productivity and the NWDA has led on the coordination of a Framework for Regional Employment and Skills action (FRESA).

Electricity Supply

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, (1) if she will make a statement about complaints from members of the public relating to information provided by electricity supply companies about reconnections of supply following the storm on 27th October; [78847]

(2) what her Department will do to analyse the response of the electricity industry to supply problems experienced as a result of the storms of 27th October; what plans she has to meet representatives of the electricity industry and discuss what lessons can be learnt as a result of supply problems following the storms of 27th October; and if she will make a statement on the performance of electricity companies in handling power supply problems in Norfolk following the storms of 27th October. [78846]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answers 4 November 2002]:* Following the storms I asked for a review of how the electricity distribution companies performed and for recommendations to help them ensure that future supplies to consumers are not affected to the same extent. This review will cover the supply problems experienced, including in the Norfolk area, and the quality of information provided to the public by the companies. I hope to publish it during December. Our follow-up plan will certainly include discussions with the industry about what lessons can be learnt.

KPNQwest

Mr. Stephen O'Brian: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade Industry, what representations her Department has received regarding regulatory issues and the bankruptcy of KPNQwest. [79107]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

My Department has not received any representations specifically regarding KPNQwest. There have however been a number of representations on regulatory issues and the risk to continuity of supply in the event of telecoms company failures.

Company Activities

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in what ways she has encouraged companies to report on the social and environmental implications of their activities. [79055]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government have undertaken a wide range of activity to encourage companies to report on their environmental and social performance. This includes the Prime Minister's challenge to the top 350 companies to publish annual environmental reports, the work of the Pioneers group on Sectoral Sustainability Strategies and practical assistance such as the General Guidelines on Environmental Reporting produced by DEFRA and DTI and published in collaboration with the CBI.

In the Modernising Company Law White Paper, the Government proposed that economically significant companies be required to prepare an operating and financial review. The proposals would require information on the company's impact on the environment and wider community, where relevant to an understanding of the company's business, to be covered in the narrative report.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she plans that subclauses 75(2)*(d)–(e)* of the Draft Clauses contained in Modernising Company Law (Cm. 5553) would require the reporting on all significant environmental, social and community impacts of a company covered by this section, were these clauses to be enacted. [79171]

Miss Melanie Johnson: If enacted as presently drafted, clause 75 would require the directors of a company to which it applied to consider whether certain information should be included in its Operating and Financial Review in order to permit the members to make an informed assessment of the company.

While subsections 75(2)*(d)* and *(e)* refer to a company's policies on environmental issues, and on social and community issues, relevant to the company's business, subsection *(f)* relates to the company's performance against those policies.

Further detail on the draft clauses on the Operating and Financial Review is at Annex D of "Modernising Company Law, Cm 5553-I".

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will use the Company Law Review to ensure that companies assess the impact of social and environmental issues on their businesses. [79051]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government's response to the Company Law Review is set out in the White Paper "Modernising Company Law (Cm 5553)". It contains proposals for a statutory statement of duties that would require all directors to recognise so far as is practical in the circumstances social and environmental issues in deciding how best to promote the success of the company for the benefit of its members. It also proposes that the most economically significant companies should report on their policies on these issues, where they are necessary for an informed assessment of the business, as part of a statutory Operating and Financial Review.

Postal Targets

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what the maximum time is that Consignia can take to deliver a parcel to an address within the United Kingdom without being in breach of its targets. [79528]

Mr. Timms: Targets for scheduled services and standards are set in the licence issued by the Postal Services Commission and agreed between Royal Mail Group plc and the Consumer Council for Postal Services.

I understand from Royal Mail that the current target for delivery of standard parcels under the terms of their licence is 90 per cent. within 3 working days after posting, including Saturday. 99.9 per cent. of parcels are targeted to be delivered within 7 working days and 100 per cent. within 15 days of posting.

I also understand from the company that parcels of unlimited weight may be sent first class and parcels of up to 750g in weight, second class. The targets for these are 92.5 per cent. within 1 day of posting for first class, 98.5 per cent. for second class and 99.9 per cent. within 3 days and 100 per cent. within 15 days for both first and second class postage.

Electricity Supply (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what investigations she has made into the fluctuations in power in homes in Gloucestershire following the restored supplies; and if she will make a statement. [79352]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* In view of the scale of the disruptions to the electricity network operated by Aquila Network Services (which supplies the Midlands area including Gloucestershire) the company has been seeking to restore supply to all customers before addressing any outstanding voltage problems, such as voltage fluctuations or low volts.

All supplies to Gloucestershire were restored by midnight on 31 October 2002. As of midday on 1 November 2002 only a few isolated customers supplied by Aquila remained off supply. Outstanding voltage problems in Gloucestershire will be resolved soon.

On 29 October 2002, I announced that a study will be commissioned to review how the electricity companies handled the emergency commencing on 27 October 2002. The response of Aquila Network Services, including resolution of follow-up problems such as voltage complaints, will be included in the study.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will make a statement about the time taken to restore power to houses in Gloucestershire. [79350]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* I have been advised that 130,000 customers in Aquila's network (formerly Midlands Electricity's network) were affected by interruptions caused by the storm. By midday on 30 October 2002 supplies had been restored to 97.3 per cent. of these customers. Supplies to all customers in Gloucestershire were restored by midnight on 31 October 2002. I advised that Aquila recruited 200 linesmen and craftsmen from other electricity companies to assist with restoration of supplies.

On 29 October 2002 I announced that a study will be commissioned to review how the electricity companies handled the emergency commencing on 27 October 2002. The response of Aquila Network Services to the widespread disruption caused by the storm will be included in the study.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what assessment she has made of the preparations which were made to counter the potential problem of cuts in power supply to homes in Gloucestershire, following gale warnings; and if she will make a statement. [79351]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Earlier this year I commissioned a study into the resilience of the electricity transmission and distribution systems in Great Britain. The study focussed on the measures that are in place to reduce the risk of an emergency from major supply interruptions and the ability to manage the restoration of supplies in the event of widespread disruption. One conclusion arising from the report was that the electricity companies are generally better prepared and equipped to handle emergencies than was the case a decade ago.

On 29 October 2002 I announced that another study will be commissioned to review how the electricity companies handled the emergency commencing on 27 October 2002. The preparation for the storm and response of Aquila Network Services, which distributes electricity to homes in Gloucestershire, will be included in the study.

Street Markets

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what assessment she has made of the contribution street markets make to the United Kingdom economy; how many people are *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly employed in such markets in the United Kingdom; and what assistance she gives to help protect and expand street markets in the United Kingdom. [77552]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are 6,215 enterprises with employees in the retail sales not in stores sector, which includes stalls and markets as well as mail order houses and other non-store retail. Total employment in these enterprises is around 100,000 and total turnover is around £11,000 million.

These enterprises account for 4 per cent. of all retail sales employers and employment and 5 per cent. of turnover. They account for half a per cent. of all employers, turnover and employment in the UK.

Recruitment Consultants (Ofgem)

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, which recruitment consultants her Department uses for assistance in recruiting people to the Board of Ofgem; and if she will make a statement. [77386]

Mr. Wilson: My Department has operated a call-off contract with five companies to assist when appropriate in the making of public appointments. We have used Saxton Bampfylde Hever plc in the making of appointments to the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority.

Future Vehicles

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what steps she is taking to encourage the development of *(a)* combined electric and petrol engine and *(b)* hydrogen fuel cell-powered vehicles. [79408]

Mr. Wilson: My Department, together with DfT, DEFRA and HMT, published the Powering Future Vehicles Strategy on 31 July. This declares Government targets for the introduction of low-carbon vehicles. The strategy not only seeks to achieve environmental improvements, but to engage UK industry in the development of new technologies and products such as hybrid and fuel cell vehicles. As part of the process, my department is supporting the creation of the Low Carbon Vehicles Partnership (LowCVP), with Professor Jim Skea of the Policy Studies Institute as Launch Director.

One of the first tasks of the LowCVP will be to advise on the role and remit of a new Centre of Excellence for "Low Carbon and Fuel Cell Technologies", to implement one of the recommendations of the Automotive Innovation and Growth Team, which reported earlier this year. My Department has announced £15 million support over 5 years for this and the other proposed Centre of Excellence on transport telematics. In addition the Department's Foresight Vehicle and Advanced Fuel Cells Programmes support the development of enabling technologies for alternative fuel vehicles.

Yemen

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what the level of bilateral trade with Yemen is. [79934]

Nigel Griffiths: In 2001, UK imports of goods from Yemen were worth £4.8 million. UK exports of goods were valued at £73.5 million.

Wind-powered Electricity

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will list the sites identified by her Department for the construction of wind-powered electricity generators. [78068]

Mr. Wilson: The Government do not have a list of sites suitable for the construction of wind powered electricity generators. It is for developers to bring proposals forward. Government information that may assist developers in considering potential locations includes the UK Windspeed Database and the document "Assessing the Potential of Wind Energy Projects: Notes for Developers," both available on the DTI website.

Liquid Petroleum Gas

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how many petrol stations in Scotland sell liquid petroleum gas, broken down by local authority area. [74968]

Mr. Wilson: The Liquid Petroleum Gas Association (LPGA) inform the Department that there is currently a total of 108 Scottish Autogas public refuelling stations, of which 52 are located at petrol stations.

On basis of data on the LPGA website these petrol stations with local Authority location, are as follows:

Glasgow	— 10	Western Isles	— 1
Aberdeenshire	— 8	Moray	— 1
Highland Region	— 5	East Lothian	— 1
Dumfries & Galloway	— 3	Stirling	— 1
Fife	— 3	Dundee City	— 1
Lanarkshire	— 3	East Ayrshire	— 1
West Lothian	— 3	Dunbartonshire	— 1
Falkirk	— 2	North Ayrshire	— 1
City of Edinburgh	— 2	Argyll & Bute	— 1
Scottish Borders	— 2		
Angus	— 2		

Electricity Supply (Hertfordshire)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will take steps to assist the homes in Herefordshire that have been without electricity for more than five days. [79981]

Mr. Wilson: I understand that all those who were cut off from electricity supply as a result of the storms have now been re-connected. Customers who have been cut off may apply to their suppliers for compensation.

Initially, it will be for the companies themselves to decide whether compensation should be offered. However, consumers can challenge non-payment through Energywatch and Ofgem. In the determination of such disputes, Ofgem would apply three tests:

whether severe weather occurred and whether it resulted in the interruption of the customers' supply;

whether the company took reasonable steps to prevent the severe weather causing an interruption to the customer's supply; and

whether the restoration process undertaken by the company was reasonable given the circumstances.

Sudanese Oil

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what plans her Department has to promote the suspension of *(a)* oil extraction and *(b)* the trading of Sudanese oil pending the signing of a sustainable peace agreement in the Sudan. [79445]

Mr. Wilson: The Department do not have any policy to halt commercial interests in Sudan. In general this Government believe that multilateral action is more effective than unilateral sanctions.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what advice is being given to UK companies involved in the *(a)* extraction and *(b)* trading of Sudanese oil. [79444]

Mr. Wilson: The Department gives full and frank advice to UK companies involved in the *(a)* extraction and *(b)* trading of Sudanese oil based on the current security situation in Sudan. We have no ongoing campaign promoting investment in the Sudanese oil industry, nor do we have any policy to halt commercial interests.

Sellafield

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which counties of the UK have been most affected by radiological leaks from Sellafield. [77545]

Margaret Beckett: I have been asked to reply.

There have been a small number of radiological leaks from Sellafield. Although these have not been radiologically significant, the Environment Agency

monitors such events closely and takes appropriate regulatory action. The areas affected are close to Sellafield in Cumbria. No other counties have been affected.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which recent representation she has had from Nordic countries on radiological pollution from Sellafield. [77543]

Margaret Beckett: I have been asked to reply.

Over the past 18 months, the Government have received a number of representations from Nordic countries about discharges of technetium-99 from Sellafield. My Department, jointly with the Department of Health, has responsibility for the regulatory regime under which such discharges are controlled.

Representations have been received from both the Governments of Norway, Finland, Denmark and Sweden and organisations representing fisheries industries in Scandinavia. The representations have centred on concerns that technetium-99, which does not occur naturally but is discharged from Sellafield, can be detected at very low levels, in marine organisms off the coasts of Scandinavian countries. All radioactive discharges from a site such as Sellafield have to be made within the limits of discharge authorizations set by the Environment Agency. The current levels of discharge of technetium-99 are well within the relevant discharge limit. At Ministers' request, the Environment Agency has recently reviewed the discharges of technetium-99 and made recommendations about how its discharge limit could be further reduced. The Government is currently considering its response to the Agency's recommendations.

DEFENCE

Military Commissions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the compatability of the United States President's proposed special military commissions with international human rights standards as provided in the statute of the International Criminal Court; and what procedures will be adopted by these bodies to reflect international standards in respect to protection of the right to a fair trial; [17755]

(2) what international rules govern the handover of prisoners of war to the jurisdiction of *(a)* state parties and *(b)* to non-state parties that (i) are not party to international rules governing use of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and (ii) may subject individuals to the death penalty. [17754]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

MoD Estate

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel are working for private companies working on contract on the MoD estate; what the cost to these companies is of employing these officers; what his Department charges for the service personnel per hour; and if he will make a statement. [26708]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many written parliamentary questions regarding private finance initiatives have been tabled since 1 January 2000; and in how many of these information has not been provided on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. [31856]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts his Department has had since 1997 with *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture for (i) accountancy, (ii) audit and (iii) consultancy work; and what staff have been seconded *(A)* to his Department and *(B)* from her Department to these firms. [32425]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years; [38757]

(2) for which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years; [38756]

(3) if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38758]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Sponsorship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the events which have been sponsored by a private organisation in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Office of Government Commerce, *(c)* the Inland Revenue and *(d)* Customs and Excise since May 1997 and the names of the sponsoring organisations; and if he will make a statement. [32510]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Forces (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of each of His Forces are stationed in Scotland; how many of his Department's civilians are in Scotland; and what the projected totals are for *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [312450]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Trident

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect civilian jobs rely upon the Trident programme; and how many will rely on it in (i) 2010 and (ii) 2020. [32437]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* special advisers working in his Department are provided with private medical insurance; how many individuals have been covered in each year since 1997–98 and at what total cost to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement. [32311]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the UK armed forces have been provided with private medical insurance in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost has been in each of these years; and if he will make a statement. [32310]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Costs

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, when he expects to be in a position to know if it is practical to give a broad estimate of costs; and if he will publish that estimate. [32330]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Micro-Organisms

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the implications of the production, development and use of micro-organisms that degrade materials when conducted for military purposes. [34966]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the research projects funded by his Department in the last five years on micro-organisms that degrade materials; and what the cost was of each project. [34967]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Overseas Bases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the overseas bases of HM Forces, indicating the number of units of permanent accommodation at each. [34833]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Helicopters

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total requirement is for trained *(a)* Lynx helicopter, *(b)* Puma, *(c)* Chinook and *(d)* Sea King pilots in each service; and how many there are at present in each case. [35644]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Single Living Accommodation

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement defining what is the minimum acceptable standard of single living accommodation in the armed services. [35272]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on *(A)* advertising and *(B)* press and public relations. [36173]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39075]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Civil Servants (New Entrants)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many new entrants to the Civil Service were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 years and over. [36491]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37449]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39083]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39072]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Catering

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38917]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if he will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37976]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39340]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Fair Trade Products

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39831]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Football

Mr. Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her Answer of 30th October, ref. 76603, how many football games she attended between 7th June and 26th November 2001 in her official capacity; and where those games took place. [79735]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did not attend any football games in her official capacity between 7 and 26 November 2001.

LORD CHANCELLOR

RoadPeace

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what actions she proposes to take to respond to representations from RoadPeace following their meeting with Ministers on 10 October 2002; and if he will make a statement. [79621]

Yvette Cooper: I will shortly be writing to RoadPeace about the issues raised at the meeting.

Criminal Justice White Paper

Mr. Simon Hughes MP: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will publish the responses he receives to the consultation on the Criminal Justice White Paper, and place them in the Library. [79622]

Yvette Cooper: The responses will be published in due course.

CABINET OFFICE

Art Loans

David Davis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, to how many Ministers paintings are loaned from *(a)* the National Gallery of England, *(b)* the National Gallery of Scotland *(c)* the National Portrait Gallery. *(d)* the Royal Academy and *(e)* the National Maritime Museum. [78644]

Mr. Alexander: Decisions on works of art in Ministerial Private Offices are made between Ministers and the Government Art Collection based in the Department of Culture Media and Sport which holds a central list.

None of the works of art hanging in my office and that of my right honourable and noble Friend the Minister for Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster are on loan from any of the institutions listed.

Honours

Andrew George: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what categories of gallantry honour are awarded by the United Kingdom. [79547]

The Prime Minister: I am replying to this question as it relates to matters for which I am responsible.

In addition to the various categories of gallantry honour available to the Services and the Armed Forces, there are four levels of award for civilian gallantry:

Level 1	The George Cross[1] This award is granted only for actions of gallantry of the greatest heroism or for the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger. It may be granted posthumously but is restricted to British subjects.
Level 2	The George Medal This award is granted for gallantry of an extremely high order. It may be granted posthumously and is not restricted to British subjects.
Level 3	The Queen's Gallantry Medal This award is granted for gallantry of a high order. It may be granted posthumously and is not restricted to British subjects.
Level 4	The Queen's Commendation for Bravery and The Queen's Commendation for Bravery in the Air These awards are granted for gallantry not up to the foregoing standard but entailing risk to life and meriting national recognition. Both awards may be granted posthumously and are not restricted to British subjects.

Note:
[1] The Victoria Cross is the first level military award for gallantry, and the standard set for the GC should reflect a similar degree of heroism. (The military Conspicuous Gallantry Cross is the military equivalent to the GM; the DSC, Military Cross and DFC to the QGM; and Mention-in-despatches to the Queen's Commendation.)

Andrew George: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many gallantry honours have been awarded and how many of those awarded posthumously, in each of the past 10 years for which records are available. [79548]

The Prime Minister: I am replying to this question as it relates to matters for which I am responsible.

Figures for gallantry awards during the years 1992–2002 are as follows:

	George Cross	*George Medal*[1]	*Queen's Gallantry Medal*[1]	*Queen's Commendation for Bravery*[1]
1992	Nil	2	2	36
1993	Nil	2(1)	13(1)	41
1994	Nil	1(1)	7(1)	58
1995	Nil	2(1)	14(1)	57(2)
1996	Nil	2(2)	17(2)	56(1)
1997	Nil	2(1)	9(3)	20(1)
1998	Nil	1	6(2)	18
1999	Nil	Nil	Nil	7
2000	Nil	2(2)	1	22
2001	Nil	1	1(1)	11
2002	Nil	Nil	1	4(1)
	Nil	15(8)	71(11)	330(5)

Note:
[1] Figures in brackets indicate the number of these awards that were made posthumously.

Andrew George: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many posthumous gallantry honours have been awarded to *(a)* non-UK citizens, *(b)* UK citizens for acts of gallantry outside the UK and *(c)* non-UK citizens who had previously been citizens of the UK in the last 10 years. [79546]

The Prime Minister: I am replying to this question as it relates to matters for which I am responsible.

Statistical records do not indicate the nationality of the recipients of honours, nor are they kept in a form which indicate the country in which the acts of gallantry took place.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Childcare

Ms Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, when the Inter Departmental Childcare Review will publish its findings. [79785]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The report from the Inter Departmental Childcare Review led by my noble friend Baroness Ashton, the Under Secretary of State with responsibility for sure start, early years and childcare, is being published today. The key conclusions of the report build on the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Spending Review statement on 15 July. The increased spending for childcare will lead to: the creation of at least 250,000 new childcare places by 2005–06, on top of the earlier target of new places for 1.6 million children by 2004; the establishment of new children's centres to provide childcare, family support and health services in one centre, reflecting the early lessons of Sure Start, to benefit up to 650,000 children in disadvantaged areas by 2006.

In addition the integration of responsibility for childcare, early years education and Sure Start within a new interdepartmental unit will ensure new services will be co-ordinated to best meet the needs of children, families and communities.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Vote Office, Printed Paper Office and the Libraries

Ms Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the Inter Departmental Childcare Review will publish its findings. [79785]

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the creation of at least 250,000 new childcare places by 2005–06, on top of the earlier target of new places for 1.6 million children by 2004;

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In addition the integration of responsibility for childcare, early years education and Sure Start within a new interdepartmental unit will ensure new services will be co-ordinated to best meet the needs of children, families and communities.

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Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will publish the report on the review of childcare by the Performance and Innovation Unit. [78594]

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures are in place to assist students in full-time education to fund child care. [78792]

Margaret Hodge: Specific childcare funding of £36 million is available through the Learner Support Funds (LSF) to all post 16 Further Education Institutions (FEIs). Students in colleges can access funding of up to £4000 for each child for each year of study. Students in school and college 6th forms have access to the same level of funding through a pilot scheme which is aimed at lone parents. FEIs also have the further flexibility to use their general LSF to top up childcare funding and to meet other additional costs, such as transport to childminders.

A childcare grant was introduced in September 2001 to help full-time higher education student parents with childcare costs. The childcare grant covers the whole year, paying 85 per cent. of actual childcare costs for 40 weeks during term times and short vacations and 70 per cent. of actual costs for 12 weeks during the student's long vacation. In the academic year 2002–03, a student parent with one child may receive a childcare grant of up to £5,724 (with two or more children up to £8,480). This may be supplemented by other dependants grants and discretionary support.

Option 5

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many letters were received in support of Option 5 from *(a)* constituents and *(b)* schools in the F40 authorities. [79440]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have received around 55,000 letters responding to the Formula Grant Review. The majority, around 53,000, are part of the campaign run by the F40 group of authorities, who have asked for a further option to be developed for education funding. However, we do not record the details of the senders of campaign letters as a matter of course. For this reason, and since very many of those 53,000 letters are multiple copies of the same letter sent by the same people to different Ministers, it is not possible to provide a more detailed analysis except at disproportionate cost.

We are currently taking decisions on the new system to replace SSAs. As we do so we are carefully considering the full range of evidence, pressures and points that have been put to us.

School Improvement Grant

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what grants were made through the school improvement grant in each local education authority in 2001–02. [79470]

Mr. Miliband: A total of £213 million was available through the Standards Fund School Improvement Grant in the 2001–02 Financial Year. Individual allocations, including the contributions from local education authorities, are shown in the following table.

Sixty per cent. of the grant is devolved to all maintained schools to raise levels of pupil attainment by funding activities in School Development, Post-Ofsted and Raising Attainment Plans. Fifteen per cent. of the grant is targeted at schools in special measures and secondary schools facing challenging circumstances to bring about urgent improvements. Five per cent. of the grant was to support direct interventions in schools facing challenging circumstances. The remainder is designed to achieve the priorities set out in local education authorities' Educational Development Plans.

Standards Fund Allocations for the School Improvement Grant 2001–2002 Local Education Authority	*Devolved* £	*Schools in Special Measures or Facing Challenging Circumstances* £	*Direct Intervention* £	*Education Development Plan Priorities* £	*Total* £
Corporation of London	5,000	0	0	2,000	7,000
Camden	360,000	65,000	46,000	120,000	591,000
Greenwich	565,000	200,000	21,000	189,000	975,000
Hackney	426,000	160,000	102,500	142,000	830,500
Hammersmith & Fulham	300,000	65,000	177,000	100,000	642,000
Islington	390,000	140,000	58,000	130,000	718,000
Kensington & Chelsea	192,000	0	0	64,000	256,000
Lambeth	487,000	130,000	16,500	163,000	796,500

Standards Fund Allocations for the School Improvement Grant 2001–2002 Local Education Authority	*Devolved* £	*Schools in Special Measures or Facing Challenging Circumstances* £	*Direct Intervention* £	*Education Development Plan Priorities* £	*Total* £
Lewisham	547,000	200,000	78,000	183,000	1,008,000
Southwark	559,000	340,000	192,500	187,000	1,278,500
Tower Hamlets	593,000	280,000	87,000	198,000	1,158,000
Wandsworth	460,000	85,000	14,000	154,000	713,000
Westminster	296,000	130,000	16,500	99,000	541,500
Barking	399,000	50,000	72,000	133,000	654,000
Barnet	728,000	305,000	185,500	243,000	1,461,500
Bexley	566,000	210,000	10,500	189,000	975,500
Brent	538,000	190,000	122,750	179,000	1,029,750
Bromley	663,000	25,000	2,500	221,000	911,500
Croydon	763,000	170,000	23,500	255,000	1,211,500
Ealing	600,000	95,000	3,500	200,000	898,500
Enfield	642,000	110,000	14,000	214,000	980,000
Haringey	524,000	155,000	353,500	175,000	1,207,500
Harrow	433,000	45,000	2,500	144,000	624,500
Havering	557,000	210,000	10,500	186,000	963,500
Hillingdon	580,000	280,000	10,500	194,000	1,064,500
Hounslow	526,000	20,000	9,500	176,000	731,500
Kingston Upon Thames	312,000	25,000	0	104,000	441,000
Merton	361,000	70,000	3,500	121,000	555,500
Newham	644,000	275,000	24,500	215,000	1,158,500
Redbridge	555,000	20,000	24,500	185,000	784,500
Richmond Upon Thames	302,000	70,000	3,500	101,000	476,500
Sutton	412,000	140,000	8,000	137,000	697,000
Waltham Forest	542,000	190,000	23,500	181,000	936,500
Birmingham	2,753,000	825,000	394,000	919,000	4,891,000
Coventry	757,000	395,000	99,000	253,000	1,504,000
Dudley	736,000	135,000	14,500	246,000	1,131,500
Sandwell	804,000	295,000	46,500	268,000	1,413,500
Solihull	549,000	65,000	69,500	183,000	866,500
Walsall	768,000	560,000	300,500	256,000	1,884,500
Wolverhampton	694,000	260,000	18,500	232,000	1,204,500
Knowsley	460,000	150,000	32,000	153,000	795,000
Liverpool	1,267,000	380,000	233,000	423,000	2,303,000
St Helens	468,000	90,000	10,500	156,000	724,500
Sefton	742,000	65,000	19,000	248,000	1,074,000
Wirral	844,000	100,000	18,500	282,000	1,244,500
Bolton	755,000	255,000	38,000	252,000	1,300,000
Bury	492,000	95,000	54,000	164,000	805,000
Manchester	1,117,000	310,000	47,876	373,000	1,847,876
Oldham	683,000	85,000	10,500	228,000	1,006,500
Rochdale	593,000	110,000	10,500	198,000	911,500
Salford	650,000	100,000	25,500	217,000	992,500
Stockport	734,000	70,000	3,500	245,000	1,052,500
Tameside	607,000	285,000	10,500	203,000	1,105,500
Trafford	576,000	230,000	73,500	192,000	1,071,500
Wigan	818,000	255,000	17,500	273,000	1,363,500
Barnsley	578,000	130,000	20,000	193,000	921,000
Doncaster	818,000	130,000	71,000	273,000	1,292,000
Rotherham	761,000	65,000	15,500	254,000	1,095,500
Sheffield	1,160,000	345,000	144,500	387,000	2,036,500
Bradford	1,452,000	220,000	901,000	485,000	3,058,000
Calderdale	586,000	110,000	176,500	195,000	1,067,500
Kirklees	1,071,000	410,000	31,000	358,000	1,870,000
Leeds	1,775,000	435,000	71,000	592,000	2,873,000
Wakefield	886,000	145,000	7,000	296,000	1,334,000
Gateshead	510,000	130,000	20,000	170,000	830,000
Newcastle Upon Tyne	634,000	110,000	17,500	212,000	973,500
North Tyneside	500,000	0	0	167,000	667,000
South Tyneside	437,000	70,000	308,500	146,000	961,500
Sunderland	768,000	105,000	178,000	256,000	1,307,000
Isles Of Scilly	16,000	0	25,000	5,000	46,000
Bath and North East Somerset	451,000	25,000	0	151,000	627,000
Bristol	896,000	300,000	48,500	299,000	1,543,500
North Somerset	452,000	25,000	0	151,000	628,000
South Gloucestershire	653,000	215,000	9,500	218,000	1,095,500
Hartlepool	252,000	40,000	9,500	84,000	385,500
Middlesborough	376,000	100,000	20,000	125,000	621,000
Redcar and Cleveland	401,000	20,000	14,000	134,000	569,000
Stockton-on-Tees	496,000	90,000	13,000	165,000	764,000
Kingston-upon-Hull	646,000	305,000	29,000	216,000	1,196,000

Standards Fund Allocations for the School Improvement Grant 2001–2002 Local Education Authority	Devolved £	Schools in Special Measures or Facing Challenging Circumstances £	Direct Intervention £	Education Development Plan Priorities £	Total £
East Riding of Yorkshire	864,000	125,000	0	288,000	1,277,000
North East Lincolnshire	457,000	135,000	175,500	152,000	919,500
North Lincolnshire	450,000	140,000	7,000	150,000	747,000
North Yorkshire	1,803,000	165,000	14,500	602,000	2,584,500
York	421,000	70,000	3,500	141,000	635,500
Bedfordshire	1,132,000	255,000	9,000	378,000	1,774,000
Luton	498,000	70,000	7,000	166,000	741,000
Buckinghamshire	1,313,000	350,000	8,000	438,000	2,109,000
Milton Keynes	574,000	210,000	66,500	192,000	1,042,500
Derbyshire	2,144,000	500,000	66,000	716,000	3,426,000
Derby City	612,000	345,000	23,500	204,000	1,184,500
Dorset	964,000	190,000	4,500	322,000	1,480,500
Poole	284,000	140,000	42,000	95,000	561,000
Bournemouth	292,000	70,000	4,500	97,000	463,500
Durham	1,509,000	440,000	104,000	504,000	2,557,000
Darlington	279,000	70,000	3,500	93,000	445,500
East Sussex	1,086,000	95,000	3,500	363,000	1,547,500
Brighton and Hove	465,000	115,000	44,500	155,000	779,500
Hampshire	2,997,000	525,000	17,500	1,001,000	4,540,500
Portsmouth	423,000	185,000	9,500	141,000	758,500
Southampton	506,000	330,000	14,000	169,000	1,019,000
Leicestershire	1,589,000	70,000	1,000	531,000	2,191,000
Leicester City	714,000	200,000	43,000	238,000	1,195,000
Rutland	101,000	0	0	34,000	135,000
Staffordshire	2,252,000	495,000	18,500	752,000	3,517,500
Stoke-on-Trent	665,000	105,000	25,000	222,000	1,017,000
Wiltshire	1,246,000	310,000	9,500	416,000	1,981,500
Swindon	490,000	260,000	24,500	164,000	938,500
Bracknell Forest	242,000	0	5,000	81,000	328,000
Windsor and Maidenhead	342,000	25,000	1,000	114,000	482,000
West Berkshire	434,000	25,000	0	145,000	604,000
Reading	301,000	240,000	4,500	100,000	645,500
Slough	300,000	180,000	69,000	100,000	649,000
Wokingham	383,000	0	0	128,000	511,000
Cambridgeshire	1,345,000	190,000	7,000	449,000	1,991,000
Peterborough	457,000	235,000	10,500	153,000	855,500
Cheshire	1,858,000	395,000	20,000	620,000	2,893,000
Halton	376,000	40,000	4,500	126,000	546,500
Warrington	522,000	190,000	8,000	174,000	894,000
Devon	1,828,000	145,000	8,500	610,000	2,591,500
Plymouth	648,000	230,000	22,500	216,000	1,116,500
Torbay	283,000	70,000	47,000	94,000	494,000
Essex	3,296,000	1,075,000	40,000	1,100,000	5,511,000
Southend-on-Sea	379,000	70,000	6,000	127,000	582,000
Thurrock	351,000	375,000	20,000	117,000	863,000
Herefordshire	489,000	95,000	3,500	163,000	750,500
Worcestershire	1,451,000	425,000	65,000	484,000	2,425,000
Kent	3,460,000	1,740,000	398,300	1,155,000	6,753,300
Medway	688,000	560,000	29,000	230,000	1,507,000
Lancashire	3,334,000	930,000	64,000	1,113,000	5,441,000
Blackburn with Darwen	440,000	45,000	161,347	147,000	793,347
Blackpool	295,000	110,000	54,500	98,000	557,500
Nottinghamshire	2,068,000	450,000	20,000	690,000	3,228,000
Nottingham City	707,000	454,166	127,500	236,000	1,524,666
Shropshire	794,000	0	0	265,000	1,059,000
Telford and Wrekin	453,000	235,000	99,200	151,000	938,200
Cornwall	1,376,000	75,000	0	459,000	1,910,000
Cumbria	1,613,000	305,000	20,000	539,000	2,477,000
Gloucestershire	1,576,000	400,000	20,000	526,000	2,522,000
Hertfordshire	2,972,000	660,000	38,000	992,000	4,662,000
Isle Of Wight	355,000	25,000	0	118,000	498,000
Lincolnshire	1,872,000	1,620,000	148,500	625,000	4,265,500
Norfolk	2,204,000	595,000	86,500	736,000	3,621,500
Northamptonshire	1,836,000	590,000	17,000	613,000	3,056,000
Northumberland	1,011,000	0	2,500	337,000	1,350,500
Oxfordshire	1,556,000	245,000	3,500	519,000	2,323,500
Somerset	1,345,000	70,000	11,000	449,000	1,875,000

Standards Fund Allocations for the School Improvement Grant 2001–2002 Local Education Authority	Devolved £	Schools in Special Measures or Facing Challenging Circumstances £	Direct Intervention £	Education Development Plan Priorities £	Total £
Suffolk	1,789,000	235,000	8,000	597,000	2,629,000
Surrey	2,297,000	145,000	2,000	767,000	3,211,000
Warwickshire	1,354,000	475,000	21,500	452,000	2,302,500
West Sussex	1,725,000	190,000	7,000	576,000	2,498,000
England Total	*128,804,000*	*33,214,166*	*7,824,973*	*42,995,000*	*212,838,139*

Higher Education

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 21 October, *Official Report*, column 38W, what the annual cost to public funds is of each higher education access measure listed. [79971]

Margaret Hodge: The relevant figures are:

Excellence Challenge—£69.6 million (2002–03)

Access/Hardship Funds—£85.5 million (2002–03)

Loans for part-time students (excluding Open University Students)—£1.3 million (2001–02)

2001–02 costs for the childcare grant; and the travel, books and equipment grant will be available in Spring 2003.

Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of teachers (i) passing the threshold for performance related pay and (ii) rising up the enhanced pay spine having passed the threshold. [79471]

Mr. Miliband: Over 200,000 teachers applied and were successful in Round 1 of Performance Threshold (97 per cent. of applications) and a further 31,000 successfully achieved threshold status in Round 2 (95 per cent. of applications to date). Teachers who were placed on point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale in Round 1 were first eligible to progress to point 2 in September 2002. It is too early to compile details of the numbers who have done so at present.

Children's Fund

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which programmes are being funded by the Children's Fund; what the results have been so far; and what further evaluation is *(a)* underway and *(b)* planned. [78329]

Mr. Denham: The Children's Fund is responsible for implementation of 149 Children's Fund programmes (Annex A) across England. The Fund is being rolled out in three waves, and to date 40 plans in Wave 1 and 50 plans in Wave 2 have been approved. The remaining 59 plans in Wave 3 will be submitting proposals at the end of the year, and approved plans will begin operating from April 2003. Programmes bring together local voluntary organisations, statutory agencies, community and faith groups, children and young people and their families to deliver a range of locally co-ordinated preventive services for 5–13 year olds at risk. Examples of activities include bi-lingual home/school liaison projects, helping children with behavioural difficulties, managing the transition between primary and secondary school, tackling truancy and promoting community cohesion through developing positive perceptions about different cultures.

The Children and Young People's Unit gather information on all services supported by the Children's Fund on a quarterly basis. The most recent information available from 38 out of 40 Wave 1 partnerships shows that 584 services were supported during April–June 2002 (Annex B). No information was gathered from Wave 2 partnerships for April–June 2002 because the majority of partnerships only received approval in April 2002. The CYPU is gathering service information on all Wave 1 and 2 partnerships for the period July–September 2002, and this information should be available later this year. It is too soon for the programme to provide an accurate indication of the direct impact on children and their families, but early feedback from children, parents, teachers and other professionals is positive. Individual programmes are already making a difference in improving school attendance, tackling behavioural problems and promoting positive parenting.

The Children and Young People's Unit are in the process of selecting a contractor for a national evaluation of the Children's Fund, and work is expected to begin early in 2003. This will draw on the results of local evaluations of achievement against measurable targets which individual partnerships are required to carry out.

Schools Performance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will rank each local education authority according to its performance on Key Stage 2 and 3 SATS results for the last three available years, including the preliminary results for 2002; and which local education authorities did not achieve 33 per cent. of pupils obtaining above average scores in each Key Stage 2 subject. [78761]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

QCA

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in respect of how many schools each year *(a)* complaints and *(b)* reports of incorrect SATS results reached the QCA; in which local education authorities those complaints and reports occurred; and how the QCA dealt with these complaints. [78772]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) does not maintain a central log of volume or nature of correspondence. All correspondence received at QCA is responded to and dealt with by the relevant team or division. It is therefore not possible to give the figures requested without incurring disproportionate cost.

The procedures for dealing with complaints fall within QCA's Customer Service Charter and are responded to within the 5-day turn-around time described in the charter. QCA replies to any general complaints under their Customer Service Charter. Where schools have concern about the quality of marking of their pupils' scripts and consider that they may have been awarded an incorrect level, a review of marking can be requested. The arrangements for seeking a review of marking are included in QCA's Schools' Guide, sent to schools each year. An application for a review of marking is considered by a panel of senior markers led by the Lead Chief Marker for the subject. Any re-marking that occurs as part of the review procedure is undertaken by a review or senior marker.

The number of reviews of marking requested in 2002 is not yet available although early estimates have not shown any significant increase on previous years' figures. Figures for 2001 are available in the Standards Reports published by QCA and will be placed in the House of Commons Library. Figures for 2002 will also be placed in the Library when available.

SATS

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will place the guidance on procedures for the conduct and integrity of SATS tests in the Library with the arrangements for monitoring the inplementation of that guidance. [78763]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* The guidance on procedures for the conduct and integrity of the National Curriculum tests is contained in the:

2003 Assessment and Reporting Arrangements booklets for Key Stages 1, 2 & 3;

Guidance on Administering the Years 7 and 8 Tests booklet;

Teacher Packs which accompany the actual test materials and re-state the guidance in the Assessment and Reporting Arrangement booklets; and

Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 Schools Guides.

The instruction for monitoring the implementation of the guidance is contained in the Test Security and Administration Monitoring Visits to Schools form.

We will place copies of current guidance in the House of Commons Library.

Individual Learning Allowance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money claimed by contractors under the ILA scheme remains unpaid. [79852]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department contracted with Capita Business Services Ltd to deliver the Individual Learning Account (ILA) programme. Since closure of the programme, Capita have worked closely with the Department on the wind down of the original programme and to assist in the development of the successor scheme. We have now agreed with Capita that, because we are undertaking a fundamental review of the funding of adult learning, their work on the successor scheme is complete and we have agreed to terminate our contract with them. The Department is discussing settlement terms with Capita.

Learning providers, who were not contracted to the Department, were required to register with Capita's ILA Centre. Currently £17.3 million is withheld from 268 learning providers.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many square feet of office space are occupied by the Worcester office of the Learning and Skills Council; and how many square feet will be occupied by the Council in its new Worcester Office; [79481]

(2) how many staff are employed in the Worcester office of the Learning and Skills Council; [79485]

(3) what the cost is of the new office space to which the Worcester office of the Learning and Skills Council is moving; and when it will move. [79486]

Margaret Hodge: These are matters for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive will write to the hon. Gentleman with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Student Loans

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if the Government will raise the repayment threshold for student loans; [79544]

(2) if his Department will reintroduce targeted maintenance support for those students from the poorest backgrounds. [79532]

Margaret Hodge: In January we will publish a strategy document setting out our vision for the development and reform of higher education, including the outcome of the review of student support. It would not be right to pre-empt it here by saying what is or is not planned.

Student Assessment

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on what the OECD PISA 2000 survey is measuring. [79435]

Mr. Miliband: The main purpose of the Programme for International Student Assessment 2000 (PISA) study is to assess the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds in three broad areas of literacy: reading, mathematics and science. It aims to assess the extent to which young people can use their knowledge and skills to meet the challenges they are likely to encounter in adult life. PISA 2000 focused on the reading literacy domain.

Top-up Fees

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1), what assessment he has made of the introduction of top-up fees for some higher education institutions in other countries; [79450]

(2) what assessment he has made of the potential impact on student access to higher education of introducing top-up fees; [79451]

(3) what evidence his Department has collated on the extent to which top-up fees for students will affect access to higher education. [79531]

Margaret Hodge: We have announced our intention to publish in January a strategy document setting out our vision for the development and reform of higher education, including the outcome of the review of student support. It would not be right to say now what evidence we have been considering or what analyses we have undertaken.

Teaching Assistants

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent through the Standards Fund on teaching assistants in each local education authority in 2001–02. [79469]

Mr. Miliband: Details of Standards Fund expenditure by local education authorities for 2001–02 are not held centrally. Some £197m was made available to authorities in 2001–02 through Standards Fund grant for the recruitment and training of teaching assistants, as set out below. 95 per cent. of this grant was was required to be devolved to schools. Schools have freedom to move funding between Standards Fund headings according to their own detailed needs and priorities.

Corporation of London	8,675
Camden	617,936
Greenwich	1,076,757
Hackney	887,749
Hammersmith & Fulham	530,145
Islington	773,211
Kensington & Chelsea	32,800
Lambeth	953,123
Lewisham	1,054,816
Southwark	1,146,748
Tower Hamlets	1,231,776
Wandsworth	813,649
Westminster	511,567
Barking	763,631
Barnet	1,116,010
Bexley	913,645
Brent	670,000
Bromley	1,005,144
Croydon	1,314,219
Ealing	1,146,233
Enfield	1,135,422
Haringey	1,062,712
Harrow	709,832
Havering	840,370
Hillingdon	932,308
Hounslow	890,678
Kingston Upon Thames	455,486
Merton	629,624
Newham	1,451,590
Redbridge	930,456
Richmond Upon Thames	461,772
Sutton	612,786
Waltham Forest	1,007,174
Birmingham	5,029,435
Coventry	1,279,289
Dudley	1,231,963
Sandwell	1,465,662
Solihull	850,634
Walsall	1,292,399
Wolverhampton	1,175,130
Knowsley	917,931
Liverpool	2,349,883
St Helens	754,754
Sefton	1,183,741
Wirral	1,430,860
Bolton	1,193,623
Bury	500,000
Manchester	2,186,905
Oldham	1,110,866
Rochdale	1,011,770
Salford	1,074,563
Stockport	960,000
Tameside	997,991
Trafford	872,352
Wigan	1,271,344
Barnsley	988,852
Doncaster	1,364,745
Rotherham	1,202,030
Sheffield	2,046,772
Bradford	2,384,079
Calderdale	896,519
Kirklees	1,712,556
Leeds	2,952,887
Wakefield	1,423,475
Gateshead	835,889
Newcastle Upon Tyne	1,094,654
North Tyneside	784,542
South Tyneside	733,341
Sunderland	1,346,144
Isles Of Scilly	14,236
Bath and North East Somerset	596,810
Bristol	1,531,452
North Somerset	630,065
South Gloucestershire	926,887
Hartlepool	457,624
Middlesborough	618,783
Redcar and Cleveland	694,649
Stockton-on-Tees	837,509
Kingston-upon-Hull	1,212,509
East Riding of Yorkshire	1,198,841
North East Lincolnshire	758,026
North Lincolnshire	650,329
North Yorkshire	2,262,426
York	612,365
Bedfordshire	1,452,150
Luton	873,261
Buckinghamshire	1,731,841
Milton Keynes	931,325
Derbyshire	3,043,238
Derby City	1,041,886
Dorset	1,193,397
Poole	434,508
Bournemouth	452,286
Durham	2,228,514
Darlington	437,775
East Sussex	1,630,639
Brighton and Hove	786,789
Hampshire	4,184,795
Portsmouth	695,848
Southampton	835,012
Leicestershire	2,135,803
Leicester City	1,312,306
Rutland	123,583
Staffordshire	3,174,241
Stoke-on-Trent	1,118,490
Wiltshire	1,637,208
Swindon	737,258
Bracknell Forest	350,873

Windsor and Maidenhead	428,008
West Berkshire	558,452
Reading	485,239
Slough	495,159
Wokingham	507,460
Cambridgeshire	1,886,801
Peterborough	733,121
Cheshire	2,594,992
Halton	601,942
Warrington	774,350
Devon	2,507,833
Plymouth	1,008,169
Torbay	449,188
Essex	4,769,297
Southend-on-Sea	619,856
Thurrock	590,385
Herefordshire	629,628
Worcestershire	1,915,094
Kent	5,024,645
Medway	1,067,556
Lancashire	4,797,935
Blackburn with Darwen	735,970
Blackpool	533,575
Nottinghamshire	3,060,305
Nottingham City	1,377,642
Shropshire	1,036,167
Telford and Wrekin	709,065
Cornwall	1,915,899
Cumbria	2,156,303
Gloucestershire	2,079,475
Hertfordshire	4,103,424
Isle Of Wight	460,329
Lincolnshire	2,470,535
Norfolk	3,128,871
Northamptonshire	2,503,761
Northumberland	1,263,218
Oxfordshire	2,071,858
Somerset	1,787,640
Suffolk	2,366,302
Surrey	3,198,226
Warwickshire	1,852,236
West Sussex	2,481,759
	196,878,831

School Grants

Patsy Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* the formula grant and *(b)* the spending per head in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in F40 authorities is in 2002–03. [79441]

Mr. Miliband: The following tables show the Standard Spending Assessment and specific/special grants per head in f40 authorities in 2002–03. Information on actual spending will not be available until the autumn of 2003:

2002–03 Primary SSA & Grants per pupil

	SSA £	*Grants* £	*Total* £
Dudley	£2,490	£410	£2,900
Solihull	£2,460	£480	£2,940
Bury	£2,520	£480	£3,010
Stockport	£2,460	£460	£2,920
Tameside	£2,600	£510	£3,100
Trafford	£2,520	£460	£2,980
Wigan	£2,500	£510	£3,010
Wakefield	£2,530	£520	£3,050
North Tyneside	£2,580	£570	£3,150
Bath and North East Somerset	£2,440	£460	£2,900
North Somerset	£2,460	£490	£2,950

2002–03 Primary SSA & Grants per pupil

	SSA £	*Grants* £	*Total* £
South Gloucestershire	£2,390	£420	£2,810
East Riding of Yorkshire	£2,480	£490	£2,970
North Yorkshire	£2,560	£500	£3,050
York	£2,480	£460	£2,940
Derbyshire	£2,490	£480	£2,980
Dorset	£2,490	£460	£2,950
Poole	£2,450	£410	£2,860
Hampshire	£2,580	£400	£2,980
Leicestershire	£2,410	£400	£2,820
Rutland	£2,470	£610	£3,080
Staffordshire	£2,450	£420	£2,870
Wiltshire	£2,510	£440	£2,950
Swindon	£2,500	£420	£2,910
West Berkshire	£2,590	£490	£3,080
Wokingham	£2,470	£410	£2,880
Cambridgeshire	£2,530	£420	£2,950
Cheshire	£2,470	£450	£2,920
Warrington	£2,450	£440	£2,880
Devon	£2,560	£460	£3,020
Worcestershire	£2,470	£420	£2,890
Nottinghamshire	£2,510	£460	£2,970
Shropshire	£2,530	£470	£3,000
Cumbria	£2,580	£520	£3,100
Gloucestershire	£2,500	£470	£2,970
Northamptonshire	£2,530	£420	£2,950
Northumberland	£2,560	£490	£3,060
Somerset	£2,530	£450	£2,980
Suffolk	£2,530	£400	£2,930
Warwickshire	£2,490	£460	£2,940

Notes:

1. Figures reflect Education SSA primary sub-block plus all primary school related revenue grants in DfES's DEL relevant to pupils aged 5–10 (primary).
2. Grant figures include notional allocations for those grants in support of more than one sector. EMA and EI
3. The SSA figures make no allowances for changes in the SSA methodology.
4. Pupil numbers underlying the £s per pupil are those underlying the SSA settlement calculations (primary sub-blocks).
5. Figures rounded to nearest £10. Difference figures may not sum due to rounding

2002–03 Secondary SSA & Grants per pupil

	SSA £	*Grants* £	*Total* £
Dudley	£3,180	£310	£3,490
Solihull	£3,120	£310	£3,420
Bury	£3,220	£290	£3,510
Stockport	£3,160	£300	£3,460
Tameside	£3,310	£330	£3,640
Trafford	£3,230	£310	£3,540
Wigan	£3,190	£330	£3,510
Wakefield	£3,250	£330	£3,580
North Tyneside	£3,320	£480	£3,790
Bath and North East Somerset	£3,060	£290	£3,360
North Somerset	£3,170	£320	£3,490
South Gloucestershire	£3,090	£290	£3,380
East Riding of Yorkshire	£3,200	£300	£3,500
North Yorkshire	£3,240	£320	£3,570
York	£3,190	£340	£3,530
Derbyshire	£3,200	£310	£3,510
Dorset	£3,180	£330	£3,500
Poole	£3,130	£300	£3,430
Hampshire	£3,320	£290	£3,610
Leicestershire	£3,090	£300	£3,400
Rutland	£3,040	£350	£3,380
Staffordshire	£3,140	£300	£3,450
Wiltshire	£3,220	£310	£3,530
Swindon	£3,200	£290	£3,490
West Berkshire	£3,280	£310	£3,590

2002–03 Secondary SSA & Grants per pupil

	SSA £	*Grants* £	*Total* £
Wokingham	£3,180	£290	£3,470
Cambridgeshire	£3,230	£300	£3,520
Cheshire	£3,150	£300	£3,450
Warrington	£3,150	£290	£3,440
Devon	£3,290	£300	£3,590
Worcestershire	£3,160	£350	£3,510
Nottinghamshire	£3,220	£290	£3,500
Shropshire	£3,230	£320	£3,550
Cumbria	£3,300	£370	£3,670
Gloucestershire	£3,190	£320	£3,510
Northamptonshire	£3,230	£330	£3,560
Northumberland	£3,290	£460	£3,750
Somerset	£3,240	£330	£3,570
Suffolk	£3,220	£370	£3,590
Warwickshire	£3,170	£300	£3,480

Notes:
1. Figures reflect Education SSA (secondary sub-block) plus all school related revenue grants in DfES's DEL relevant to pupils 11–15 (secondary).
2. Grant figures include notional allocations for those grants in support of more than one sector. EMA and
3. The SSA figures make no allowances for changes in the SSA methodology.
4. Pupil numbers underlying the £s per pupil are those underlying the SSA settlement calculations (secondary sub-block).
5. Figures rounded to nearest £10. Difference figures may not sum due to rounding.

Golden Hello

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers in each local education authority were entitled to a golden hello in 2001–02. [79467]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows provisional data on the number of claims for reimbursement of Golden Hello payments received by my Department in respect of the 2001–02 financial year. The payments comprise a mixture of "old-style", £2,500 Golden Hellos paid on appointment to a relevant post and "new-style", £4,000 Golden Hellos paid on successful completion of induction. The number of newly-qualified teachers who were eligible to receive an "old-style" payment in 2001–02, but exercised their right to claim a "new-style" Golden Hello later is not known.

Local Education Authority[1]	*Number of claims*
Camden	6
Greenwich	17
Islington	2
Tower Hamlets	9
Wandsworth	12
Barnet	10
Bexley	9
Brent	4
Bromley	10
Enfield	3
Haringey	4
Hounslow	2
Kingston upon Thames	3
Merton	3
Newham	8
Redbridge	8
Richmond upon Thames	1
Sutton	6
Birmingham	7
Coventry	9
Dudley	3
Sandwell	2
Solihull	7
Walsall	3
Knowsley	6
Liverpool	12
St Helens	6
Wirral	7
Manchester	12
Oldham	9
Rochdale	5
Salford	7
Stockport	3
Tameside	5
Trafford	2
Wigan	6
Barnsley	1
Rotherham	8
Sheffield	10
Bradford	4
Leeds	7
Gateshead	9
North Tyneside	10
Bath + NE Somerset	5
Bristol	3
North Somerset	1
South Gloucestershire	9
Hartlepool	1
Middlesbrough	1
Redcar and Cleveland	3
Stockton-on-Tees	4
East Riding	4
North East Lincolnshire	7
North Lincolnshire	1
North Yorkshire	6
York	2
Bedfordshire	11
Luton	2
Buckinghamshire	6
Milton Keynes	5
Derby	6
Dorset	3
Poole	5
Durham	14
East Sussex	7
Brighton and Hove	2
Hampshire	22
Portsmouth	1
Leicestershire	6
Staffordshire	11
Wiltshire	4
Swindon	10
Berkshire	5
Reading	3
Slough	1
Wokingham	10
Cambridgeshire	6
Cheshire	19
Halton	6
Warrington	11
Devon	6
Plymouth	4
Torbay	3
Essex	28
Southend-on-Sea	3
Worcestershire	3
Medway	11
Blackburn and Darwen	4
Blackpool	7
Nottinghamshire	19
Nottingham	3
Shropshire	3
Cornwall	9
Cumbria	5

Local Education Authority[1]	*Number of claims*
Gloucestershire	12
Hertfordshire	30
Isle of Wight	1
Lincolnshire	15
Northamptonshire	8
Northumberland	18
Somerset	2
Suffolk	14
Warwickshire	18
West Sussex	9

Note:
1. LEAs not listed have submitted no claims for reimbursement in 2001–02.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many newly qualified teachers in each local education authority were entitled to induction support in 2001–02. [79468]

Mr. Miliband: All Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) who take up a post of one term or more in a maintained school, or non-maintained special school, are entitled to induction. This includes a 10 per cent. reduced timetable, ongoing support and guidance, and an individually tailored induction programme. NQTs can also undertake induction in independent schools and sixth-form colleges, although there is no statutory obligation to do so in such institutions.

The information on the number of NQTs undertaking induction in each LEA is now held by the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE). The information for the academic year 2001–2002 will be available in the next few days and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as I have it.

Teachers (Warning Notices)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on how many occasions in each local education authority section 15 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 has been invoked for *(a)* warning notices and *(b)* subsequent formal interventions. [79562]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not routinely collect information on the number of formal warnings issued under section 15 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, nor on the number of these that lead to the subsequent use of the intervention powers by local authorities.

Any decisions to issue such warnings and to use such powers are for local education authorities. Statutory guidance on the use of formal warning notices was given in Annex 2 of the Code of Practice on Local Education Authority-School Relations in February 2001. A copy of this guidance is in the Library.

Swimming Lessons

Patsy Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what steps are being taken to ensure that schools provide sufficient curriculum time for school swimming in order to meet National Curriculum targets; [79276]

(2) when she will provide further details of the increased training of PE teachers in swimming and water safety announced on 17 October; [79277]

(3) how many children fail to meet National Curriculum standards in swimming at age 11; what criteria will be used to select the areas for remedial swimming pilots as announced on 17 October; and what funding will be made available for this; [79278]

(4) what figures she collates on how many schools ask for parental contributions for curriculum swimming lessons. [79182]

Mr. Miliband: We are developing a package of measures to deliver our commitment to enhance the take up of sporting opportunities by 5 to 16-year-olds by increasing the percentage of school children who spend a minimum of 2 hours each week during term time on high-quality PE and school sport. Our Swimming Strategy was announced on 17 October. Part of that Strategy, the Swimming Charter which will be published in 2003, will provide non-statutory guidance to schools on how much time to allocate for swimming specifically as part of this commitment to enhance sporting opportunities for children. Other details of the strategy, including the criteria to be used to select the areas for remedial swimming pilots, funding to be made available and details of increased training for PE teachers in swimming and water safety, are being developed. The Department does not collect data on how many schools ask for parental contributions for curriculum swimming lessons. Some 20 per cent. of children aged 11 years old fail to meet National Curriculum standards in swimming (Swimming In Key Stage 2: An Inspection Report on Standards and Provision; OFSTED, 2000).

Higher Education

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skill what definition of higher education is used in the context of his Department's target of increasing participation in higher education towards an entry rate of 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds by 2010. [78381]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Progress towards the target is measured by the number of first time entrants to higher education aged 18–30, as a proportion of the relevant population. The target covers all courses of one year or more above A level and its equivalents that lead to a recognised higher education qualification.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what projections he has made of the proportion of 18 to 30-year-olds who will experience higher education courses in each year until 2010. [78382]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* A wide range of alternative scenarios, based on different assumptions about the future impact of current policies on demand for higher education are being considered. At this stage we are confident that there will be sufficient growth in demand from young people with the appropriate entry qualifications for higher education to enable us to reach the 50 per cent. target. Provisional figures suggesting a 2 per cent. increase in the number of

home domiciled UCAS accepted applications this autumn to UK higher education institutions, shows we are continuing to make progress.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what evidence the Government collated on the impact of introducing top-up fees for students on access to higher education, with special reference to foreign examples; [78693]

(2) how she plans to consult students on the review of higher education. [78694]

Margaret Hodge: We will publish a strategy document in January setting out our vision for the development and reform of higher education, including the outcome of the student support review. As part of the review we are considering a wide range of evidence but we clearly cannot pre-empt the strategy document at this stage. Information on how interested parties can respond to the document will be made available when it is published.

Schools (Essex)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will adopt policies to ensure that no schools in Essex suffer a cash budget cut in the next financial year. [78477]

Mr. Miliband: In introducing the new system of LEA funding for 2003–04, we will implement the pledge that no local education authority will lose out in real terms in 2003–04. The Education Act 2002 incorporates a reserve power that allows the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to set a minimum budget for an authority's schools, if the budget proposed by an authority is seriously inadequate. Changes in the funding of individual schools depend very largely on changes in their pupil numbers. It is open to LEAs, if they wish, to include factors in their school funding formulae which have the effect of protecting individual schools from excessive year-to year reductions in their budget shares.

Pupil Spending

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* the actual revenue spending per child at (i) primary and (ii) secondary level and *(b)* the standard spending assessments were in each local education authority in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [79334]

Mr. Miliband: Net current expenditure per child is available for years up to 2000–01, so the last five years' figures are from 1996–97 to 2000–01. Standard Spending Assessments are available up to 2002–03, so figures are provided from 1996–97 to 2002–03. This information is contained in tables which have been placed in the Library. The figures are shown by local education authority area and are in cash and real terms.

Pupil Referral Units

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils were educated in pupil referral units, and for how many hours on average per week, in *(a)* the London Borough of Enfield, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* England and Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [78080]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is shown in the following table.

Pupil Referral Units: Number of Pupils on Roll

1998 to 2002

Position in January each year.

	1998			1999			2000		
	Number of Solely Registered Pupils[1]	*Number of Dually Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Pupils also registered with Other Providers*[2]	*Number of Solely Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Dually Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Pupils also registered with Other Providers*[2]	*Number of Solely Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Dually Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Pupils also registered with Other Providers*[2]
England	*7,740*	*4,166*		*8,263*	*4,202*		*6,986*	*4,586*	*1,493*
London	2,005	662		2,195	628		1,740	863	236
Outer London	999	304		1,026	335		807	423	114
Enfield LEA	115	3		110	30		105	36	0

	2001			2002		
	Number of Solely Registered Pupils[1]	*Number of Dually Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Pupils also registered with Other Providers*[2]	*Number of Solely Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Dually Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Pupils also registered with Other Providers*[2]
England	*7,308*	*4,993*	*1,981*	*7,614*	*4,968*	*2,342*
London	1,895	751	243	2,063	607	288

	2001			2002		
	Number of Solely Registered Pupils[1]	*Number of Dually Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Pupils also registered with Other Providers*[2]	*Number of Solely Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Dually Registered Pupils*[1]	*Number of Pupils also registered with Other Providers*[2]
Outer London	783	387	183	933	306	187
Enfield LEA	85	25	10	117	14	15

Notes:
[1] Solely registered pupils are those pupils who are only on a Pupil Referral Unit's register. Dually registered pupils are those pupils who are on a Pupil Referral Unit's register and on another school's register.
[2] Other providers are FE colleges or a voluntary provider
Not available. This information was not collected prior to 2000.
Source:
Annual Schools Census

Information is collected on the average amount of contact time which is spent by pupils of different ages in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in a typical week. As the contact times are recorded in bands, the data cannot be readily averaged or aggregated. Nevertheless, the figures indicate that between 40–45 per cent. of the 312 PRUs nationally reported average contact time for solely registered pupils of 20 hours or more per week. Of the 47 PRUs in London, over 50 per cent. had average contact times with pupils of 20 hours or more per week. The 2 PRUs in Enfield LEA generally had average contact time with pupils of between 13 and 19 hours per week.

Equivalent contact times for dually registered pupils will generally be less than those for solely registered pupils.

The pupils in PRUs have varying needs and are enrolled there for a variety of reasons and this will include pupils who have been permanently excluded. From September 2002 all LEAs are required to provide full time education for all permanently excluded pupils.

I refer the hon. Member to the Welsh Assembly for information on pupils in Wales.

PRIME MINISTER

Focus Group Research

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what use he and his Department has made of focus group research since June 2001; if he will identify for each research project the topics covered, the person or organisation carrying out the research, and the total cost; and if he will publish the research on his Department's website. [74996]

The Prime Minister: My office has not commissioned any focus group research since June 2001.

E-Mail

Sue Doughty: To ask the Prime Minister what e-mail address members of the public may use to contact him. [79661]

The Prime Minister: At present there is no e-mail address by which members of the public can contact me. However an address will be made available in the new year.

Policy Advisers

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on the protocols covering discussions between policy advisers in 10 Downing Street and ministers; [79047]

(2) Under what circumstances policy advisers within 10 Downing Street are able to direct *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials within other Departments. [79046]

The Prime Minister: Discussions between policy advisers in 10 Downing Street and Ministers and civil servants in other Departments are conducted in accordance with the *Ministerial Code*, the *Civil Service Code* and the *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers*.

Policy advisers do not have powers of direction.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with President Chirac and Chancellor Schroeder on military invasion of Iraq without fresh UN authorisation. [79563]

The Prime Minister: I regularly discuss Iraq with my EU colleagues, most recently during the European Council at Brussels on 24–25 October. I reported the outcome to the House in my statement of 28 October 2002.

Deaths (Soldiers)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Prime Minister, if he will call an independent public inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of soldiers in army barracks in the UK since 1990. [79129]

The Prime Minister: It would be inappropriate to undertake any such inquiry whilst the current police investigations into the deaths at Deepcut continue. In the meantime, I am fully aware of the concerns that have been raised about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of soldiers in Army barracks in the United Kingdom.

There are a number of issues being taken forward by the Ministry of Defence in response to the concerns that have been raised about deaths of soldiers in army barracks in the UK. This work includes an appraisal of initial training of non-Officer recruits in all three services. The Defence Committee has also indicated its intention to conduct an inquiry into the general conditions at Deepcut. Following the conclusion of the

police investigations into the deaths at Deepcut, the Army will also convene internal Boards of Inquiry into the deaths of Privates Geoff Gray and James Collinson.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Fire Services

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many fire appliances dedicated for training purposes there are in England and Wales, broken down by *(a)* fire brigade area and *(b)* local authority. [79675]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not hold information centrally on the number of fire appliances dedicated for training purposes; however, this information is published by The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) who provide a statistical information service. The information can be found broken down by fire authority, but not fire brigade, at page 10 of their publication entitled Fire Service Statistics 2001 (SIS reference 01.02). A copy is available in the Libraries of the House.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many fire stations there are in North East London; how many fire engines are located in them; how many Green Goddesses would be expected to cover the area in the event of these fire engines not being deemed to be available due to a national strike of firefighters; and if he will make a statement. [78463]

Mr. Raynsford: The London Fire Brigade has forty-one fire engines at twenty-six fire stations in the London Boroughs of Havering, Hackney, Waltham Forest, Newham, Barking & Dagenham, Redbridge and Tower Hamlets.

Emergency cover in Greater London is currently planned to consist of a number of elements including 90 Green Goddess crews, 20 breathing apparatus teams (BARTs), a rescue team equipped with specialist equipment (a REST) and the police. Of these, sixteen Green Goddesses and four BARTs would be located in the above boroughs, with a further seven Green Goddesses and two BARTs located just outside those boundaries.

The provision of MoD emergency fire cover has been planned in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer to minimise call-out times and maximise the availability of a range of firefighting capabilities.

The command and operational structure for emergency fire cover has been designed to enable maximum flexibility and use of available resources, whether from within a county or from assets deployed nearby in neighbouring counties. The deployment of firefighters will be based on the assessment of how best to respond to an emergency in the quickest time possible. The deployment will be kept under review.

Housing

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the level of empty *(a)* housing association and *(b)* council housing was in each local authority in England in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001; and if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to reduce the level of empty housing association and council housing. [79677]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested has been placed in the Library. The table presents data showing the vacancy rates of local authority and Registered Social Landlord stock (respectively) in each local authority in England at 1 April 1997 and 2001. Note that council stock owned by an authority, which is outside their local authority area, is not included in these figures.

Day to day management, including the letting of empty properties, is a matter for individual housing associations and councils. We expect those with high levels of vacant housing to set challenging targets for reductions through improved management performance or action to improve or dispose of unpopular stock.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what evidence his Department has collated on the use of repeated applications for planning permission by companies and individuals in a specified location; [78998]

(2) what consideration has been given to the setting of time limits between applications for planning permission by companies and individuals in a specified location. [78999]

Mr. McNulty: Local planning authorities already have the power to decline to determine a planning application which is the same or substantially the same as an application which, within the previous two years, the Secretary of State has called in and refused, or has dismissed on appeal.

As announced in our Statement "Sustainable Communities: Delivering through planning" we intend to extend this power so that a local planning authority can also decline to determine an application which is the same or substantially the same as an application which has either been refused by the authority within the last two years and there has been no appeal to the Secretary of State, or has not been finally determined. The two year time limit was chosen since this is the same as that which applies to a local planning authority's existing powers to decline to determine repeated applications.

The Planning Green Paper said that some developers use repeated applications to wear down opposition to undesirable development. This is damaging to people's confidence in the planning process and inefficient. Of those who responded to our proposal to extend local planning authorities' powers to decline to determine repeat applications, 97 per cent. were in favour.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many units of affordable housing have been built in the Portsmouth South constituency in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [78967]

Mr. McNulty: The only information available is for the local authority area of Portsmouth and for the last four years. The numbers of houses built by registered social landlords in Portsmouth were 279 in 1998–99, 37 in 1999–00, 95 in 2000–01 and 151 in 2001–02. There were no houses built by the local authority during this period.

Right to Buy

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what discussions Ministers and officials of his Department have held with members of the review team evaluating the Right to Buy scheme; what was discussed; when they were; and who the participants were; [79590]

(2) when the review of the right to buy scheme will be published; [79602]

(3) what the estimated cost is of the evaluation of the right to buy scheme being undertaken by the review team; [79604]

(4) if he will publish the *(a)* names and *(b)* qualifications of the review team undertaking the evaluation of the right to buy scheme. [79603]

Mr. McNulty: Researchers at Heriot-Watt University have been commissioned to investigate the scale, nature and impact of exploitation of the Right to Buy rules.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister research contracts are awarded through a standard procurement process, by competitive tender. The experience and skills of tenderers are assessed carefully as part of this process. This research project is subject to normal project management procedures and disciplines operated by professional and policy officials. It is subject to review by a stakeholder group drawn from housing practitioners and representatives of lending institutions and local government.

The cost of the project is £92,650, excluding VAT.

The results are expected by the end of this year, and will be published thereafter. It is standard practice for all Office of the Deputy Prime Minister research publications to include the names of the authors, and for any other researchers to be acknowledged.

Urban Summit

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, how many *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* Members of the other House taking the Labour Whip and *(c)* elected Labour councillors are (i) speaking and (ii) chairing themed discussions at the Urban Summit. [79342]

Mr. McNulty: In total about 150 people contributed to the Urban Summit as speakers, chairs or pannellists. There were 13 Ministers (including 3 members of the other House), 7 elected Labour Councillors (including one member of the other House) and one further member of the other House taking the Labour Whip speaking at the Urban Summit, either at plenary sessions or in themed sessions. One Minister chaired a themed session, another was chaired by a member from the other House taking the Labour whip and a third by an elected Labour Councillor.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many of the advertised *(a)* speakers and *(b)* chairmen of the themed sessions of the Urban Summit come from the private sector and are not members of Government-appointed public bodies. [79341]

Mr. McNulty: More than 23 speakers, including plenary session speakers and panellists, and 3 chairs of the themed sessions came from the private sector. Information on how many of these are members of any Government appointed bodies is not readily available.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he plans to take to disseminate the results of the Urban Summit to *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* councillors and *(c)* Members of the other House belonging to the (i) Conservative and (ii) Liberal Democrat parties. [79345]

Mr. McNulty: The results of the Urban Summit will be disseminated in a variety of ways. In particular, the messages and ideas coming from the Summit are to be fed into the development of the long term plan for sustainable communities which the Deputy Prime Minister will be presenting to the House in January 2003. A report of the proceedings of the Summit will be deposited in the House of Commons library. More generally, information on the outcomes from the debate and discussion at the Summit will be posted on the Urban Summit website, www.urbansummit.gov.uk.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the SSA is, for each local authority in England *(a)* by service block and *(b)* in total for 2002–03; what these figures would be if 2001 census data had been substituted for mid-year 2000 population estimates; and what the difference is between the two sets of figures expressed (i) in £s and (ii) as a percentage of 2002–03 SSAs *(A)* for the relevant service block and *(B)* in total. [79873]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House. The 2001 census population data have been used, as requested, rather than the mid-2001 population estimates which we intend to use to calculate the 2003–04 Formula Spending Shares (FSSs).

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, how many of the speakers and chairmen of the themed seminars of the Urban Summit are members of the *(a)* Conservative, *(b)* Liberal Democrat and *(c)* Labour parties. [79340]

Mr. McNulty: Speakers and chairs were invited to take part in the summit on the basis of the contribution they could make. The choice of speakers for each themed session was made in consultation with the chair of that session. We hold no information—other than for those where it is clear eg MPs, Councillors—about their membership of any political parties.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many of the advertised *(a)* speakers and *(b)* chairmen of the themed sessions are (i) Conservatives and (ii) Liberal Democrat local councillors. [79343]

Mr. McNulty: One of the speakers at a themed session was a Conservative Councillor. From the information available none of the speakers were Liberal Democrat Councillors. None of the chairs of the themed sessions were Conservative or Liberal Democrat Councillors.

Transport

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the transport implications of his oral statement of 18 July. [72112]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I made clear in my statement on 18 July that the strategy I announced for sustainable communities would link policies on housing, planning, transport, education, health and regeneration. I will be having discussions with all relevant colleagues as I prepare the Communities plan.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 522W, on renewable energy, what discussions he has had with the Scottish Parliament about its revised planning guidance on renewable energy; and if he will make a statement. [79075]

Mr. McNulty: We are currently preparing the revised draft planning guidance on renewable energy (PPS 22). In doing so, we have been in discussion with a number of interested parties including the Scottish Executive. There will be further consultation, and discussions will continue ahead of issuing the draft guidance at the turn of the year for public consultation.

Green Belt

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many applications have been *(a)* received and *(b)* approved for development on Green Belt land since 1997, broken down by region; and if he will make a statement. [79681]

Mr. McNulty: Applications for planning permission are considered by local planning authorities in the first instance. The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) of 17 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 926, on the green belt, if he will list the locations and number of hectares respectively of new green belt land earmarked since June 1997. [77381]

Mr. McNulty: Since June 1997 new Green Belt has been earmarked in Development Plans in the following locations:

	Hectares
Stockport	8
Basildon	340
North Hertfordshire	3600
Dacorum	1000
North Tyneside	1672
Blyth Valley	2800
Tynedale	7300
Castle Morpeth	200
Gateshead	1500
Sunderland	520
Co Durham	12000
	30940

	Hectares
Removals from the Green Belt are:	
Newcastle	543
Bradford	90
	633
Total addition	30307

Planning Guidance

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what advice he gives local authorities and planning inspectors on how they should define whether a proposed development close to the edge of an existing conurbation is *(a)* an urban extension or *(b)* a new settlement. [77864]

Mr. McNulty: The Government's planning policies for housing are set out in PPG3 (Planning Policy Guidance note 3, *Housing*). PPG3 explains that planned extensions to existing urban areas are likely to prove the next most sustainable option for new housing development after building on appropriate sites within urban areas, and that new settlements can be large-scale additions to existing settlements or freestanding. PPG3 does not define urban extension or new settlement in any further detail.

The characteristics of alternative forms of new development are discussed in the 1993 Department of Environment research report *Alternative Development Patterns: new settlements*. Urban extensions are described as development that takes place at the edges of existing urban areas, and new settlements as urban growth that is accommodated by a new focus for development that is freestanding.

Seller's Pack

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the introduction of the Seller's Pack. [79680]

Mr. McNulty: We are committed to making it easier for people buying and selling homes through the introduction of a seller's pack, and the necessary legislation will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows. The seller's pack will make the home buying and selling process more transparent and certain, and so reduce the stress and wasted costs suffered by hundreds of thousands of consumers each year when transactions fail or are delayed.

Right to Buy

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish the evidence on which he based his statement that the right-to-buy scheme is being abused; and if he will make a statement. [79601]

Mr. McNulty: Anecdotal evidence from various sources, including local authorities and media advertisements, strongly suggested that the right to buy rules were being exploited in some areas. Researchers at Heriot-Watt University have been commissioned to investigate the scale, nature and impact of such exploitation. The results are expected by the end of this

year, and will be published thereafter. The difficulties experienced on the Ocean Estate in Stepney, East London, are well documented.

Council House Stock

Mr. Steen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the local housing authorities who have transferred council house stock amounting to fewer than 499 properties to a single alternative social landlord since 1988, and state in each case *(a)* the grant from Government to write off debt, *(b)* the total cost to the local authority in professional fees, *(c)* other relevant costs of the transfer and *(d)* the capital receipt. [78917]

Mr. McNulty: No payments have been made by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister, or its predecessor Departments, since arrangements were put in place in 1999 toward repaying local authority housing attributable debt on transfers of fewer than 499 dwellings. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not keep a record of local authorities who have transferred fewer than 499 properties to registered social landlords, the cost to the local authority of professional fees, other relevant transfer costs or capital receipts in such transfers.

Housing Authorities

Mr. Steen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, how many local housing authorities have applied for a place on the LSVT programme for each year since 1993; and how many were successful. [78915]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister record the number of local housing authorities who are accepted onto the Large Scale Voluntary Transfers disposals programme each year. The information for the years in question is set out in the table below.

Year of Programme	*Number of Local Authorities Successfully Gaining a Place*
1993	13
1994	12
1995	11
1996	5
1997	17
1998	23
1999	25
2000	22
2001	27[1]
2002	20[2]

Notes:
[1]Between 1993 and 2000 the duration of each transfer programme was one year. This period was extended to 2 years from 2001.
[2]There are 5 more authorities who have a place on the disposals programme held open for them while their schemes are further developed.

Valuation Tribunals

Mr. Swire: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to increase the powers of authority of the tribunal chairman and clerk to obtain facts and information in order to increase the parity between the appellant and the Valuation Office Agency in disputes. [79253]

Mr. Leslie: There are no plans to increase the powers of authority of valuation tribunal chairmen and clerks. Tribunals already have wide ranging powers to conduct hearings in such a manner as to ensure just handling and to adjourn hearings to enable relevant information or facts to be provided.

Government Office for London

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the annual expenditure of the Government Office for London was; how many full time employees or equivalent there were in each year since its establishment; and if he will make a statement. [79597]

Mrs. Roche: Government Office for London (GOL) Running Costs expenditure is as follows (£m):

1996–97	14.1
1997–98	13.5
1998–99	16.0
1999–2000	16.0
2000–01	13.2
2001–02	13.2

No staffing figures are available prior to 1999. Approximate full time equivalent posts from April 1999 are as follows:

April 1999	390
April 2000	370
April 2001	240
April 2002	260

The number has subsequently risen to approximately 295, chiefly due to the transfer to GOL from the Home Office of 19 crime reduction staff (in June 2002) and 10 Drug Prevention Advisory Service staff (on 1 October).

"Your Region, Your Choice"

Mr. Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost to the taxpayer was of producing the North West Regional Assembly publication, "Your Region, Your Choice-Revitalising English Regions"; and how many copies were printed. [79706]

Mr. Raynsford: This document was produced by the North West Regional Assembly as a response to the Government's White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice; Revitalising the English Regions*. The publication and its content and costs are a matter for the Assembly.

HEALTH

Faith Communities

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list projects involving faith communities which are supported by his Department. [71847]

Ms Blears: The Department recognises the diverse health needs within communities and the key role played by faith organisations, supporting National

Health Service and social care organisations, to improve the health and well-being of local people. The Department's central funding should be viewed as complimentary to additional funding by local NHS and social care organisations working with local faith communities.

The Department's main funding support to voluntary / not for profit organisations is the Section 64 General Scheme under the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968.

Additionally there are smaller budgets managed by policy teams within the Department which are used to develop initiatives to improve access to healthcare, for example working through faith communities with black and minority ethnic groups on priority areas such as coronary heart disease, mental illness and cancer.

Grants Awarded, in the information provided, represents the amount of funding made available from 2002–3 onwards. The grant awarded will reflect, in some cases, the final year of a funding phase a three year funding ending in 2002–3.

Grants Awarded through Section 64 General Grants Scheme

Organisation	*Purpose of funding*	*Grant Awarded*
Muslim Khatri Association	To take forward the Department of Health's cancer and coronary heart disease prevention campaign by undertaking community education and health development activities in the Highfields area.	£102,000
Arab Women's Group (Muslim organisation)	To organise road shows within Arab catchment areas in Britain including community centres, Places of worship to provide information in Arabic on health, legal and welfare issues targeted at the Arab community.	£72,000
Muslim Doctors and Dentists Association	To promote healthy living in minority ethnic community centres run by the Muslim Doctors and Dentists Association specialists by organising seminars and producing leaflets.	£87,000
Jewish Care	The Mental Health Outreach Project was originally piloted by Jewish Care in 2001. Support is tailored to the individual needs of service users and in line with the aims of the NSF. The team work to encourage and empower service users, to combat discrimination and to promote social inclusion both nationally and within the context of Jewish tradition and culture. The pilot has been successful and a waiting list now exists particularly as outreach targets people who are hard to engage.	£121,000
Asian Family Counselling Service	The Naya Rasta—"New Hope" project aim is to reduce the dependence of depressed Asian men and women on anti depressants. The project aims to offer clients one-to-one counselling as well as being part of a self-help group.	£105,000
AIDS Care Education and Training (ACET)	ACET's aim is to deliver prevention initiatives through a programme of sexual health education, and training for those who are working for and with young people.	£154,000
The CARA Trust	The Trust provides pastoral care for people affected by HIV/AIDS; their relatives and friends; professional and voluntary carers.	£71,000
Jewish AIDS Trust	Jewish AIDS Trust (JAT) provides culturally and religiously sensitive HIV and sexual health education/prevention programmes to a wide range of Jewish organisations. JAT is the only agency in the UK targeting this particular minority ethnic community.	£25,000
Mildmay Mission Hospital	Mildmay is the UK's only specialist provider of HIV/AIDS palliative care services offering an integrated package of residential and day care services to people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.	£420,000

Projects funded through Vote 2 (Improving access to health services for black and minority ethnic groups)

Organisation	*Purpose of Funding*	*Amount of Grant*
Network of Sikh Organisations	To promote work on the prevention of coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer through seminars with health professionals and the Sikh community and to develop newsletter in Punjabi/English to promote health messages to the Sikh community	£107,000
National Council of Hindu Temples	To work nationally with Hindu Temples to provide advice and information on health issues such as coronary heart disease, cancer, diabetes, mental illness for the Hindu community.	£110,000
London Central Mosque Trust and Islamic Cultural Centre	To take forward the Department of Health's smoking cessation campaign especially during the times of the Ramadan and Eid. Also to help coordinate and establish links between health service providers and the local Muslim organisations.	£110,400
The Swaminarayan Hindu Temple	To fund the post of an outreach health worker to undertake health promotion and education among the Hindu community in relation to coronary heart disease, stroke, screening etc. This includes the preparation of tobacco education audio-visual and printed materials for the worshipers	£85,000
Mauritian Islamic Welfare Association	To develop a training pack to improve the speech and language development of minority ethnic children and to undertake health promotion and screening programme aimed at the Asian community	£121,000
Muslim Cultural Heritage	To set up a healthy living lifestyle project including smoking cessation among the local Muslim population	£49,055

Projects funded through Vote 2 (Improving access to health services for black and minority ethnic groups)

Organisation	*Purpose of Funding*	*Amount of Grant*
The Muslim Council of Britain	Set up a smoking cessation clinic and promote the clinic through community events.	£25,000
Agan Khan Health Board (The Ismaili Centre) A Muslim Organisation	To produce a video resource and handbook promoting awareness on diet relating to coronary heart disease and diabetes within the Asian community	£40,000

Growth Hormone Deficiency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what plans he has to deal with medical problems associated with growth hormone deficiency. [73351]

Jacqui Smith: Clinicians are currently able to prescribe growth hormone, also known as somatropin, to patients with growth hormone deficiency.

The National Institute of Clinical Excellence did recommend the use of growth hormone in children earlier this year. It is currently appraising the clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of human growth hormone in adults. There was an appeal against their 20 August 2002 final appraisal determination. This appeal has been partially upheld. Further work will be done in this area with a final decision expected early in the new year.

Oxygen Therapy

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many users of oxygen therapy there are in Huntingdonshire. [74231]

Ms Blears: The number of users of oxygen therapy is not available centrally.

Breast Cancer

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent representations he has received on the availability of taxanes; and if he will make a statement; [74214]

(2) how much was spent on taxanes for breast cancer for the most recent financial year available, broken down by *(a)* health authority and *(b)* health trusts; and if he will make a statement; [74212]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of women benefiting from treatment for breast cancer *(a)* before and *(b)* after publication of the most recent NICE guidance; and if he will make a statement. [74213]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published its review of taxanes (docetaxel and paclitaxel) for the treatment of breast cancer in September 2001.

There have been no recent representations on the availability of taxanes.

All health authorities have confirmed that they are implementing the NICE appraisals. However, the Department does not hold central data on the number of patients treated with a particular drug or on the amount spent on individual drugs. NICE estimate the additional cost to the National Health Service of implementing the guidance on taxanes to be around £16 million per annum for England and Wales and that around 5,000 women are likely to benefit from the guidance.

Hospital Staffing Levels

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will make a statement on staffing levels at Oldchurch Hospital, Romford. [75106]

Mr. Hutton: The annual workforce censuses do not provide information for individual trusts. Oldchurch hospital is part of Barking, Havering and Redbridge National Health Service Trust, which was formed in April 2001. There is therefore no comparable historical information.

The Department's vacancy survey collected information for the whole trust as at 30 March 2002. The trust has been ensuring that the impact of vacancies on the quality of care provided to its patients is minimised by being one of the first trusts in London to use the NHS Professionals service. NHS Professionals is a NHS temporary staffing service aimed at reducing reliance on expensive nursing agencies. The trust is also very active in pursuing the *Improving Working Lives* initiative. A steering group, with cross-trust representation, including staff-side, has been meeting since April to take forward the *Improving Working Lives* action plan, aimed at achieving practice status early in 2003.

Criminal Records Bureau Checks

Annette Brooke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what provision is being made for local authorities incurring additional costs from hiring agency staff whilst waiting for checks to be completed by the Criminal Records Bureau on permanent care workers. [77088]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The National Care Standards Commission has issued guidance about taking on staff while a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check is being undertaken.

Before they could work in a care setting, agency staff would themselves need to undergo CRB checks. For example, under the Care Standards Act, there is an obligation to ensure a criminal records check has been obtained from the CRB in relation to all people beginning work at a care home for adults who have regular contact with the residents of the home. This includes volunteers and agency staff.

GP Training

Mr. Roger Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what plans his Department has to improve the training provision for GPs in relation to audiology and other ear, nose and throat services. [77109]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are investing significantly in training provision in the National Health Service for all staff including general practitioners (GPs). The Department and the Royal College of General Practitioners are working together to develop guidelines for the appointment of GPs with special interests. A specific guideline for the appointment of a GPs with special interests in ear, nose & throat will be published shortly. Any training implications of this will be determined locally and will depend on local service needs, national priorities and the needs of individual GPs.

Placements (Vulnerable Children)

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of the cost of specialist residential placements for vulnerable children was contributed by health authorities in *(a)* Dorset, *(b)* Somerset and *(c)* Hampshire in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02; [77086]

(2) what guidance the Department gives to health authorities in England on the criteria to use when deciding how much to contribute towards the cost of specialist residential placements for vulnerable children. [77380]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not issued guidance to the National Health Service on the cost of specialist residential placements for vulnerable children. Such funding is a matter for local determination.

The information requested for Dorset, Somerset and Hampshire is not held centrally.

Splints

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will make a statement on the prevalence of the free supply of splints to disabled people on the NHS *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Gloucestershire. [76960]

Jacqui Smith: Figures are not collected centrally on the numbers of orthotic devices which are supplied through the National Health Service.

Child Protection

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what the recommended thresholds for *(a)* providing child protection services, *(b)* instigating child protection inquiries and *(c)* convening initial child protection conferences are. [78041]

Jacqui Smith: Where a child is suspected to be suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm, local authority social services departments are required by section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to make enquiries, to enable the local authority to decide whether it should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

Where, following the outcome of section 47 enquiries, the agencies most involved judge that a child may continue to suffer, or to be at risk of suffering significant harm, the social services department should convene an initial child protection conference. The aim of the conference is to enable those professionals most involved with the child and family to assess all relevant information; to make judgements about the likelihood of a child suffering significant harm in future; and to decide what future action is needed to safeguard the child and promote his or her welfare, how that action will be taken forward, and with what intended outcomes.

If a decision is taken that the child is at continuing risk of significant harm, his or her name will be placed on the child protection register, and it will therefore be the case that safeguarding the child requires inter-agency help and intervention delivered through a formal child protection plan. It is also the role of the conference to formulate the outline child protection plan, in as much detail as possible.

A child's name may not be placed on the register, but he or she may nonetheless be in need of help to promote his or her health or development. In these circumstances, the conference should ensure that arrangements are in place to consider with the family, what further help and support might be offered.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the Chief Inspector of Social Services does not publish an annual report into how well children are being protected from harm. [78019]

Jacqui Smith: The Chief Inspector of Social Services produces an annual report to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State on the general state of social services. This report includes a section on children's services.

The Chief Inspector also produces national reports, covering a five yearly rolling programme of in depth inspections of councils' children's services.

In addition, last Winter the social services inspectorate (SSI) led the first of an ongoing series of three yearly major inter-agency inspections of safeguards for children. The SSI designed and co-ordinated this inspection, which took place in eight local authority areas, working with the seven other statutory inspectorates who are involved with services to children and families—OFSTED, the HM Inspectorates for Prisons, Probation, Constabulary, Magistrates' Courts Services and the Crown Prosecution Service, and the Commission for Health Improvement—to look at how well local services ensure the safeguarding of children and how well they work in partnership to address child welfare concerns. The SSI drafted the report of the inspection and published it on 14 October 2002.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what proportion of children on child protection registers do not have allocated social workers. [78026]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally. However, it is of interest that all children on the child protection register in the councils visited during last winter's children's safeguards inspections had an allocated social worker.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many children at residential and boarding schools are on child protection registers. [78040]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to *(a)* establish multi-agency safeguarding teams including social workers, health professionals, police and other child professionals, *(b)* strengthen area child protection committees by increasing their resources and *(c)* establish a child safeguarding board to provide greater protection for children. [79688]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* Area child protection committee (ACPC) expenditure and administrative policy support is a matter for local agreement. As a multi-agency forum, the ACPC should be supported in its work by its main constituent agencies, reflecting the investment of each agency in activities which are of benefit to all, in particular inter-agency training.

The Joint Chief Inspectors' report *Safeguarding Children*, published on 14 October 2002, contains a recommendation that the Department should review the current arrangements for ACPCs to determine whether they should be established on a statutory basis to ensure adequate accountability, authority and funding.

The Government has welcomed the publication of this report. The Government recognises that there is still more to be done to ensure that the high standards of child protection are applied in every case. That is why it commissioned the Joint Chief Inspectors' report. It is also why my right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Health and the Home Secretary set up the statutory Inquiry, chaired by Lord Laming, into the circumstances leading up to, and surrounding, the death of Victoria Climbié. The issues raised by Victoria's case are wide-ranging, in terms of both policy and practice, and it is therefore important that we do not do anything that would pre-empt the outcome of the Inquiry. The recommendations of the Joint Chief Inspectors' report and those of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry will provide us with an authoritative basis for any reforms to child protection that may need to be made, and if radical reform is necessary we will implement it. The Government will respond to both reports after it has carefully considered them.

Suicides

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many suicides have occurred in accident and emergency departments in each of the past five years. [78002]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected centrally on the number of suicides in accident and emergency departments.

Children's Rights

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, who the Children's Rights Director is. [78042]

Jacqui Smith: The first ever Children's Rights Director for England is Dr. Roger Morgan.

The role of the Children's Rights Director, located within the National Care Standards Commission, was established by the Care Standards Act 2000. The primary role is to safeguard those children who are in receipt of a range of regulated services. These services include those provided by children's homes, independent fostering agencies, local authority fostering services, the welfare aspects of boarding schools and, in due course, residential family centres, voluntary adoption agencies and local authority adoption services.

Regulations specifying the Children's Rights Director's functions commenced on 24 May 2002 and were debated in Standing Committee on Thursday 4 July 2002.

Suicide Reduction

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what progress has been made in meeting the Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation target on suicide reduction. [78050]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Worthing, West on 18 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 148–149.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many children were waiting to be referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in each quarter in the last two years. [78030]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected centrally in this form.

Social Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason social services departments are not always contactable by accident and emergency departments during the evenings. [78025]

Jacqui Smith: It is the responsibility of local authorities to make sure that they have proper systems for responding to emergencies when they arise.

The White Paper, *Modernising Social Services*, reminded local authorities of the need to "provide reliable and sufficient out of hours services". In October 1999 the social services inspectorate published a report of its inspection of social services out of hours services entitled *Open All Hours*. The report encouraged social services managers to review their out of hours provision and contained guidance on providing out of hours services.

Spanish Nurses

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many Spanish nurses have worked in the NHS in each of the last three years in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* the Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Trust; [77606]

(2) how many Spanish nurses are working in the NHS in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* the Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Trust. [77605]

Mr. Hutton: Over the last two years, the Department has been working closely with the Ministrio de Sanidad y Consumo—the Spanish Ministry of Health—to give Spanish nurses the opportunity to come and work in England.

Between January 2001 and October 2002, 508 Spanish nurses have taken up positions as a result of this government to government initiative. We do not routinely collect information about overall numbers of international recruits into the National Health Service, including those from Spain

Lancashire organisations that have participated in the recruitment are Trafford General Hospital NHS Trust, Stockport NHS Trust and Trafford Acute NHS Trust. The Department does not have information on numbers currently working in NHS hospitals.

NHS Running Costs

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total running costs of NHS organisations serving *(a)* the Vale of York constituency and *(b)* North Yorkshire were in 1997; and what the total is now. [77835]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table:

NHS Organisation	*1997 (£m)*	*2002–2003 (£m)*
North Yorkshire Health Authority	5.9	N/A
North & East Yorkshire & Northern Lincolnshire Health Authority	N/A	4.0
Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust	3.164	3.558
Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	3.441	3.816
York Health Services NHS Trust	5.273	5.0
Hambleton and Richmondshire Primary Care Trust	N/A	1.890
Craven, Harrogate and Rural District Primary Care Trust	N/A	1.980
Selby and York Primary Care Trust	N/A	4.320
Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale Primary Care Trust	N/A	2.225
Total	17.778	26.789

Sources:
North & East Yorkshire & Northern Lincolnshire Heath Authority.
The 2002–2003 costs relate to anticipated expenditure at 31 March.
Any comparisons between 1997 and 2002 would be influenced by inflation and the transfer of Trust management costs into PCTs where services have transferred, e.g. community and mental health services.

In addition, following the changes resulting from shifting the balance of power, the North & East Yorkshire & Northern Lincolnshire Health Authority (HA) covers a much wider geographic area than the former North Yorkshire HA. Many of its functions have been devolved from the former regional office of the Department.

EU Working Time Directive

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications of extending the Working Time Directive to junior doctors *(a)* for medical workforce planning and *(b)* on their training; and if he will make a statement. [77505]

Mr. Hutton: The impact of the European Working Time Directive (EWTD) has been taken into account with the planned expansion in the consultant workforce. The NHS Plan makes a commitment to 1,000 more specialist registrars by 2004. In addition, we have introduced a "floors and ceilings" flexibility to allow the National Health Service with an initial ceiling of an additional 540 posts for the period of 2002–2004 and this will reviewed later this year.

Many solutions to achieve EWTD compliance for junior doctors will involve other professions. Large increases in the nursing workforce and allied health professions have already been achieved and there is a commitment to maintain these levels of growth. These increases in the non-medical workforce will support the development of the non-medical practitioner roles required. The main impact of these practitioners will be in reducing the need to cover at senior house officer level.

It will be inevitable that the changes needed to achieve EWTD compliance will significantly affect the working patterns of doctors in training and also change the traditional one-to-one relationship between a training grade doctor and their consultant.

The Department is currently undertaking a consultation exercise on the Chief Medical Officer's report *Unfinished Business: Proposals for reform of the Senior House Officer grade*. The report provides proposals for reform of postgraduate medical training, taking into account that proposed reform would be introduced at the same time as implementation of the EWTD. The report argues that the EWTD and training reform are mutually dependent—the EWTD will require reform in training, which in turn can support implementation of the Directive.

A key proposal in *Unfinished Business* is that new and shorter higher specialist training programmes should be introduced which would lead to the award of an earlier certificate of completion of specialist training (CCST) for those satisfactorily completing training in the "generalist" elements of a specialty. This would have the effect increasing the flow of trained doctors.

The Department will be working with the Deans and the Royal Colleges to ensure that NHS trusts are supported in delivering training with good advice on training models and as a first step the Conference of

Postgraduate Medical Deans (COPMED) has produced a document *Liberating Learning*. This sets out approaches to providing training in the EWTD context.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with representatives of the British Medical Association concerning derogations for junior doctors from the Working Time Directive; and if he will make a statement. [77507]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health and the health departments of the devolved administrations have, on several occasions over the past year, held discussions with the British Medical Association junior doctors' committee about derogations for junior doctors from the European Working Time Directive (EWTD). Discussions came to a halt in July as the two sides did not reach a collective agreement on derogation. The Government intends to derogate for junior doctors from the EWTD by amending the 1998 Working Time Regulations.

Care Homes

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many care home places are available in the London Borough of Hillingdon; what percentage change this represents on figures for each of the last three years; and what the forecast is for care home places for the coming year. [77959]

Jacqui Smith: The number of residential and nursing care home places in Hillingdon is shown in the table at 31 March for the years 1999 to 2001. Data for 2002 is not yet available.

Forecasts of the number of care home places are not made.

Number of Residential and Nursing Care Home Places in Hillingdon at 31 March, 1999 to 2001

As at 31 March	*Residential*	*Nursing*	*Total*	*Change Over Previous Year (%)*
1999	820	460	1,270	—
2000	960	410	1,360	7%
2001	920	490	1,400	3%

Note:
1. Residential data refer to Hillingdon Local Authority; nursing data refer to Hillingdon Health Authority.

GP Recruitment

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to increase the number of GPs in the NHS. [77511]

Mr. Hutton: A range of recruitment and retention initiatives are currently in place or being developed to help increase the number of general practitioners (GPs), including: international recruitment, promoting improving working lives initiative in primary care, the delayed retirement scheme, more flexible employment arrangements through personal medical services, the recently announced extension to the flexible careers scheme to include GPs and the golden hello scheme which will shortly be extended to include qualified doctors who are not currently working in National Health Service general practice who return to take up a NHS post.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will make a statement on progress made in GP recruitment in the last 12 months. [77144]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Between 30 September 2000 and 30 September 2001, the number of general practitioners (GPs), including unrestricted principals and equivalents, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (para. 52 SFA), personal medical services others and GP retainers working in the National Health Service increased by 466. A spring census was carried out on 31 March 2002, which shows a further increase of 176.

The government has introduced and is developing a significant number of initiatives to boost the recruitment and retention of GPs. These include golden hellos to new and returning GPs, delayed retirement payments, flexible career scheme, extension of the improving working lives initiative to primary care and international recruitment.

Competition Commission

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the long-term implications of public spending of the recent judgment on Bettercare by the Competition Commission. [78416]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 30 October 2002.

Learning Difficulties

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many children in Surrey aged *(a)* 0 to five, *(b)* five to 11, *(c)* 11 to 16 and *(d)* 16 to 18 years have been diagnosed as having (i) severe learning difficulties and (ii) moderate learning difficulties at the latest date for which figures are available. [78370]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not collected centrally.

Fragile-X Syndrome

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children aged *(a)* 0 to five, *(b)* five to 11, *(c)* 11 to 16 and *(d)* 16 to 18 years have been diagnosed with fragile-X syndrome at the latest date for which figures are available. [78368]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not collected centrally. Studies have indicated that fragile-X syndrome has an incidence of about 1:4,500 in males and 1:8,000 in females.

Community Equipment Services

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional resources have been allocated in this financial year for community equipment services; and how this has been allocated. [78572]

Jacqui Smith: In this financial year £28 million was allocated to health authorities to help them to meet the NHS Plan targets for community equipment services. That funding has now been distributed to primary care trusts. In addition, funding was allocated to local councils for the same purpose via the personal social services settlement. For both sets of organisations the funding was apportioned and distributed as part of their baseline funding allocations.

Nurse Retention

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what determinants of job satisfaction are employed in assessing nurse retention policies. [78928]

Mr. Hutton: The *Human Resources in the NHS Plan* underpins all staff retention policies. It sets out how the National Health Service should become a model employer, that values its staff and improves the working life and how it should offer a model career that gives greater access to personal development underpinned by a fairer pay system. All of the measures contained in the *Human Resources in the NHS Plan* will help to improve the job satisfaction and morale of all of the staff employed in the NHS.

Asthma Deaths

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if his Department will ask primary care trusts to introduce enquiries into asthma deaths as a matter of course; [78624]

(2) what plans his Department has to introduce confidential enquiries into asthma deaths as a means of research into prevention and cure of this condition. [78623]

Jacqui Smith: There are currently no plans to require primary care trusts to introduce enquiries into asthma deaths or to extend the range of confidential enquiries to include asthma deaths.

Management of asthma mainly takes place in primary care. The chronic disease management programme, introduced in July 1993, provides arrangements for health promotion under the general medical services national contract for general practitioners. People with asthma will also benefit from the emerging expert patients programme which will—via the National Health Service—provide training in self-management skills for people with long term chronic conditions.

The Medical Research Council, which is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry, funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the research base. The Department of Health spend on directly commissioned research projects on asthma since 1997 is an estimated £7.24 million.

The number of deaths from asthma is gradually declining. The Office of National Statistics report that the International Classification of Disease, ICD9 493 (Asthma) recorded for England and Wales that in 1998 there were 1366 deaths caused by asthma and by 2000 that had fallen to 1272 deaths.

Barnet Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress on visiting times for accident and emergency services at Barnet Hospital. [78901]

Mr. Hutton: Improving patients experience of emergency care is essential. In light of this, *Reforming Emergency Care* was launched in October 2001, supported by a £118 million investment. It sets a long term programme of reform supported by extra investment and new capacity to address one of the public's key concerns about the National Health Service—waiting in accident and emergency (A&E).

A&E waiting times at Barnet General Hospital have improved steadily through the year from an average of only 45 per cent. of patients being seen within four hours in the quarter ending 30 June 2002 to over 70 per cent. being seen within four hours during October 2002.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to discontinue services provided at Barnet Hospital; and if he will make a statement. [78899]

Mr. Hutton: There are no plans to discontinue services provided at Barnet hospital.

Quality Protects Programme

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress of the Quality Protects Programme. [78974]

Jacqui Smith: *Quality Protects* is the Government's five-year programme to ensure that children in need, including looked after children, receive the care, safety, security and chances in life that all children deserve. We are currently in the fourth year of the programme. It has been popular—with local government, with the voluntary sector and with children and young people themselves—and has led to new and improved services for children across the country.

There is real evidence that it is beginning to improve children's lives. For example, since *Quality Protects* began we have seen:

More corporate working across councils and greater understanding of councils' and councillors' role as "corporate parents";

More partnership working with voluntary organisations;

An increase in the proportion of children looked after placed for adoption—3,100 looked after children were adopted in England in the year to 31 March 2001, 12 per cent. more than in the previous year and 39 per cent. more than in 1998–99;

Children in care experiencing fewer placements—16 per cent. of children now experience three or more placements in one year as opposed to 19 per cent. in 1997–98;

A reduction in the number of re-registrations on the child protection register from 20 per cent. in 1997–98 to 14per cent. in 2000–2001;

More support being given to care leavers;

More councils listening to children and young people in their care;

Improvements in the collecting and use of management information.

We shall shortly be publishing an overview report of councils' fourth annual management action plans, which set out their progress in and future plans for implementing *Quality Protects*.

Social Workers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 21 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 128W, on social workers, if he will provide the provisional recruitment and departure figures referred to. [78832]

Jacqui Smith: The number of individual applicants for social work training was 4703 in 2001. The provisional figure for 2002 is 5093.

The 2002 figure is adjusted to an estimated full year figure based on the very small number of additional applications made after October in 2001.

We do not collect centrally figures on retirements.

NHS Targets

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many NHS staff are armed services reservists; and what *(a)* assessment he has made of the impact of call up connected to the war on terrorism on NHS services and *(b)* adjustments will be made to current year targets in the NHS. [78713]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not hold information centrally on the number of National Health Service staff who are armed service reservists. The Department reviews constantly its readiness to deal with demand on NHS services of this nature. The Department does not plan to make any adjustments to current year targets in the NHS.

Operations Costs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost of an in-patient operation on *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* a private hospital was in the last 12 months. [78695]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the average cost of a wide range of treatments and procedures carried out in the National Health Service is included in the national schedule of reference costs. Reference costs for 2001–2002 were published on 1 November. They may be found at www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/refcosts.htm and a copy has been placed in the Library. The Department does not collect information on the average cost of operations carried out in private hospitals.

Bed Occupancy

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average bed occupancy rate was at Eastbourne District General Hospital in each of the last 24 months. [78700]

Ms Blears: Figures on the average daily number of available and occupied beds for each National Health Service trust are published annually on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity. Data is not available on a monthly basis.

Asylum Seekers

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether local authorities will be given further provision to their social services budgets relating to asylum seekers' residential accommodation following the ruling on Westminster City Council *v.* National Asylum Support Service on 17th October. [78647]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The Law Lords judgment on the Westminster City Council *v.* National Asylum Support Service appeal of 17 October 2002 upholds the decision of the Court of Appeal given on 10 April 2001. There are no plans to provide local councils with additional funding as a result of the judgement.

Abuse of Parents

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the numbers of children who physically abuse their parent or parents. [78823]

Jacqui Smith: Data on the number of incidences of adults abuse is not collected centrally.

Lifeline Equipment

Candy Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1), what assessment has been made of the cost of free provision of lifelines through the NHS; [78994]

(2) what financial assistance is available to older people for the purchase of lifelines through the NHS. [79050]

Jacqui Smith: Lifeline alarm systems are not normally purchased or provided by the National Health Service and no assessment has been made of the cost of doing so. "Lifelines" are 24-hour alarm services usually triggered by a call button in the room or worn around the neck. The equipment that supports them is frequently installed in residential or sheltered housing provided by local councils or registered social landlords. Depending on local eligibility criteria some landlords make a charge to residents to cover the ongoing cost of the equipment and specialist call centre.

Care Homes Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications for care homes staff have been *(a)* received and *(b)* processed by the National Care Standards Commission in each month since April. [79410]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission exists to regulate and inspect social care and independent health care services. It has strong powers of enforcement to ensure that services meet the required standards. The Commission does not receive applications from care home staff.

The processing by the Criminal Records Bureau of criminal records checks for staff in care homes is a matter for the Home Office.

Dentists

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to assist refugees with dental qualifications to practise in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [79003]

Mr. Hutton: We are committed to enabling refugee dentists to access the training opportunities they need to succeed in the National Health Service. Over the last two years £1 million has been made available to various projects designed to help refugee health professionals, including dentists, prepare for work in the NHS, by providing English language and clinical skills training, along with guidance on gaining employment in the NHS.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1), how many people are waiting to sit each part of the international qualifying exams to practise dentistry in the UK; and if he will make a statement; [79002]

(2) what measures he is taking to assist those with overseas dental qualifications who are not refugees qualify to practise dentistry in the United Kingdom. [79001]

Mr. Hutton: The General Dental Council (GDC) regulates dentistry in the United Kingdom and all practitioners must be registered with the Council.

Dental qualifications obtained in the European Economic Area (EEA) that reach minimum training standards are mutually recognised throughout the EEA.

The GDC recognises certain overseas dental qualifications as being eligible for registration. Dentists qualifying in Australia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Malta—only up to 1978, New Zealand, Singapore and at most South African dental schools before 1 January 2001 are eligible for registration with the GDC. Dentists qualifying in other countries or in any other non-EEA country after 1 January 2001 are required to take the GDC international qualifying examination or Bachelor of Dental Surgery before becoming eligible for registration.

Details of individuals waiting to sit each part of the IQE are as follows:

Part A

53 Candidates have been invited to sit exams in November 2002. There are currently 95 candidates on the waiting list and a capacity for 100 in March 2003.

Part B

45 candidates will sit exams in November and January 2003. This leaves 59 candidates on the waiting list and a capacity of 92 during the period March to July 2003.

Part C

77 Candidates will sit exams in November 2002, January and February 2003. This would leave 34 candidates on the waiting list and a capacity of 32 places in April-May 2003. Further examination dates are to be confirmed.

Undergraduate Training

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government's policy is on the training of medical undergraduates in prescribing practices for antibiotics; and if he will make a statement. [79698]

Mr. Hutton: Individual university medical schools determine their own undergraduate medical curriculum in the light of recommendations from the General Medical Council's education committee, which has the statutory responsibility to determine the extent and knowledge and skill required for the granting of primary medical qualifications in the United Kingdom.

The education committee's most recent recommendations on undergraduate medical education are contained in *Tomorrow's Doctors* which was published in July 2002. It states that graduates must know about and understand the effective and safe use of medicines as a basis for prescribing. This includes side effects, harmful interactions, antibiotic resistance and genetic indicators of the appropriateness of drugs.

Microbiologists

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 259W, on microbiologists, what information his Department collates on the number of microbiologists working in the NHS. [78527]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Healthcare scientists and doctors work as microbiologists within the National Health Service. The Department's workforce censuses collect detailed information to specialty level for the medical workforce but do not record the number of healthcare scientists working as microbiologists.

As at September 2001 there were 570 doctors (400 consultants) working in the medical microbiology and virology specialty, increases of 60 and 40 respectively on the numbers employed in 1997. The information currently collected by the Department does not differentiate between microbiologists and virologists.

The Department's vacancy survey collected information on the medical microbiology and virology specialty for the first time this year. Nationally as at 30 March 2002 there were ten consultant vacancies in this specialty.

Ministerial Visits

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, when he next plans to visit a hospital in Europe. [73920]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* There are currently no plans for any Ministerial visits to any hospitals in Europe.

Lancashire Air Ambulance Service

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what support he *(a)* gives and *(b)* intends to give the Lancashire Air Ambulance Service. [77893]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* The Lancashire Air Ambulance received £239,000 in 2002–2003 and will be provided with further support in the next financial year. Discussions for further funding is still to be finalised on the extent of the support required by air ambulance services nationally.

Care of the Elderly

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* reviews are being undertaken and *(b)* action plans are being developed to correct shortcomings reflected in the Better Care Higher Standards Charter, as set out on page 172 of the milestones of the National Service Framework for Older People; [78423]

(2) what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the Better Care Higher Standards charter is working, as set out on page 172 of the milestones of the National Service Framework for Older People. [78422]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* We plan to carry out a review of the effectiveness of the charter by March 2003. This will include an analysis of local charters for 2002–03.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what estimates his Department has made of the change in the number of the elderly in England over the next 30 years; and how this will affect the requirement for residential and nursing care. [77149]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The personal social services research unit (PSSRU) long-term care model was developed by the PSSRU at the London School of Economics as part of its research programme funded by the Department. This model projects that the total number of number of people aged 65 and over will increase by 60 per cent. between 2000 and 2031.

In the recently published *Improvement, Expansion and Reform: The next 3 years*, we set the target of an increase of 6,000 in the number of people in care homes supported by councils over the three years to 2006. This is in acknowledgement of the increasing population of older people.

Gosport War Memorial Hospital

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the investigation into the suspicious deaths at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital. [78426]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Following publication of the Commission for Health Improvement report into the care of elderly patients at the hospital, the Chief Medical Officer commissioned Professor Richard Baker to undertake a clinical audit. As the hon. Member is aware there is also an ongoing police investigation. It would be inappropriate for me to comment further until the results of both investigations are clear.

Health Authority Planning

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures he is putting in place to ensure StHAs have designed their planning processes before the next financial year, as set out in paragraph 6.7 of the document Improvement, Expansion & Reform: The Next Three Years [78420]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The document *Improvement, Expansion and Reform* sets out the vision for services over the next three years, describing how national commitments translate into targets for the National Health Service and social services. The process and timetable for developing plans at a local level were also contained in this document.

The new planning process involves streamlining current arrangements into a planning system based on a single three year local delivery plan. This process will be reinforced by the announcement of three year financial allocations to primary care trusts, giving the NHS locally the ability to plan for the medium term more effectively than in the past.

Child Obesity

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out his definition of obesity in children. [78429]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 October]:* The simple classification of body mass index (BMI) for obesity in adults is not applicable to children. This is because the ratio of the rate of weight gain to height gain changes during normal growth, especially around puberty. Therefore, age and sex-specific reference data—centile cut-off points—are necessary to interpret the BMI measurement.

There is on going debate as to the most appropriate cut-off point to define obesity in childhood. Two different approaches are commonly used and both demonstrate that the prevalence of obesity is increasing in children in England.

Diabetes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people, broken down by *(a)* age, *(b)* sex and *(c)* ethnicity were affected with Type II diabetes in each of the last three years. [78430]

Jacqui Smith: An estimated 1.3 million people in England have diagnosed diabetes, of whom around 85 per cent. have Type 2 diabetes. A break down in the form requested is not available. However, the frequency of diabetes is higher in men than in women. Prevalence rises steeply with age. Type 2 diabetes is up to six times more common in people of South Asian descent and up to three times more common in those of African and African-Caribbean descent, compared with the white population. It is also more common in people of Chinese descent and other non-white groups.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 869W, on ethical foreign nurse recruitment, if he will estimate the number of nursing agencies in the UK that recruit nurses from overseas. [78528]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The Department does not collect statistics on the number of nursing agencies in the United Kingdom recruiting from overseas. The information contained in the code of practice website is monitored and updated routinely.

NHS Staff

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what progress has been made in reducing the use of bank staff within the NHS. [59185]

Mr. Hutton *[pursuant to his reply, 12 June 2002, c. 1315W]:* I regret my previous answer contained a numerical error.

The data on the overall the NHS workforce should read that it has "increased by 4.3 per cent. to 1,166,600.", and not, as my original answer suggested "1,1666,000".

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will make a statement on the number of *(a)* admissions to hospital, *(b)* visits to a GP and *(c)* other interfaces with the National Health Service that were alcohol related and their combined cost in each of the last five years. [67020]

Ms Blears *[pursuant to her reply 12 July 2002, c. 1267W]:* I regret my previous answer was incorrect. This was a mathematical error.

In table 1, National Health Service hospital admissions where there was a primary diagnosis of selected alcohol related disease, the total figure for 1997–98 should read, 45,800.

In table 2, Estimated cost of alcohol misuse to the NHS, England and Wales, 1999, the total cost to NHS should read, £208 million.

Asthma-related Deaths

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many asthma-related deaths there were in each of the last five years, broken down by age group. [78622]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mrs. Annette Brooke, dated 6 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning how many asthma-related deaths there were in each of the last five years, broken down by age group. [78622]

The figures requested are given in the table below:

Number[1] of asthma-related[2] deaths in England and Wales by age group, 1997–2001

number of deaths

Age Group	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*Calendar Year 2001[3]*
00–04	4	3	6	2	7
05–09	10	9	6	7	6
10–14	7	12	11	13	13
15–19	16	9	20	13	16
20–24	22	10	22	23	7
25–29	27	13	13	17	17
30–34	20	21	21	26	15
35–39	28	31	32	19	26
40–44	41	37	31	46	38
45–49	43	41	55	58	41
50–54	67	73	61	78	58
55–59	75	112	85	73	71
60–64	110	82	88	84	89
65–69	135	146	143	103	117
70–74	200	166	157	164	127
75–79	200	194	178	185	158
80–84	191	179	165	146	162
85+	243	228	270	215	300
All ages	1439	1366	1364	1272	1268

Notes:

[1] Figures are for deaths occurring in each calendar year.

[2] Defined as deaths where the underlying cause of death was coded as asthma (International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD9), code 493 for the years 1997 to 2000 and International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD10), codes J45–J46 for the year 2001).

[3] Details of the effect of the change in classification in 2001 are described in a report published in May 2002.[i]

[i] Office for National Statistics. Results of the ICD-10 bridge coding study, England and Wales, 1999. *Health Statistics Quarterly* 14 (2002), 75–83.

Source:

Office for National Statistics.

Written Answers to Questions

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CABINET OFFICE

Correspondence

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he will reply to the hon. Member for New Forest West's letter of 24 September regarding Mr. Douglas Alexander. [80218]

Mr. Alexander: My officials wrote to the hon. Member on the 7 October 2002, explaining that the subject matter raised was better suited to the Department for Works and Pensions and had been transferred. I understand that they will be responding shortly.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what public consultations have been commenced by his Department in each month since 10 July; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80263]

Mr. Alexander: The information for formal national public written consultations by the Cabinet Office is as follows:

In the Service of Democracy: a consultation paper on a policy for electronic democracy

(a) 16 July 2002

(b) 31 October 2002

www.edemocracy.gov.uk

Better Policy Making and Regulatory Impact Assessment: Consultation on draft guidance for policy makers

(a) 2 August 2002

(b) 25th October 2002

www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/scrutiny/consultation.htm

Private Action, Public Benefit: A review of charities and the wider not for profit sector—a consultation

(a) 25 September 2002

(b) 31 December 2002

www.strategy.gov.uk/consultation/consultation.shtml

National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy—A Consultation Document

(a) 15 October 2002

(b) 15 January 2003 and website address:

www.strategy.gov.uk/consultation/consultation.shtml

PRIME MINISTER

Honours Scrutiny Committee

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister, what the responsibilities are of the Honours Scrutiny Committee. [80386]

The Prime Minister: The membership of the Honours Scrutiny Committee and its responsibilities are set out in an Order of Council dated 18 October 2002. I am placing copies of the Order in the Libraries of both Houses.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Graham Allen: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his Answer of 17 October, *Official Report*, column 78W, on royal prerogative, if he will make a fuller statement of the reasons for his statement that the House is already given the opportunity to debate such decisions. [78884]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I gave to the House on Tuesday 24 September, *Official Report*, column 7.

Prime Ministerial Visits

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the towns in the UK he has visited in his official capacity during this Parliament. [79025]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* Records of my official visits are not categorised in this way. My visits cover a range of matters including health, education, and tourism. I also travel regularly to my constituency.

I travel making the most efficient and cost-effective arrangements. My travel arrangements are in accordance with the arrangements for official travel set out in chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code, and the accompanying guidance document, Travel by Ministers.

My Office's records show that I have undertaken the following visits in the UK since June 2001:

Date	*Destination*
22 June 2001	Newton Aycliffe
26–27 July	Carlisle
	Penrith
	Keswick
	Hull
1–2 September	Edinburgh
	Aberdeen
7–8 September	Hartlepool
11 September	Brighton
2 October	Brighton
30 October	Bristol
	Cardiff
5 November	Birmingham
22–23 Nov	Birmingham
	Redcar
27 November	London
3 December	London
6 December	London
6 December	Reading
10 December	Hockley
20–21 December	Sunderland
24 January 2002	Darlington, Newcastle, Newton Aycliffe
12 February	London
20 February	London
21–22 February	Newcastle
	Wallsend
	Durham
	Dundee

Date	Destination
21–22 March	Manchester
	Bolton
25 March	London
11–12 April	Newton Aycliffe
	Darlington
18 April	London
2 May	Belfast
7 May	Glasgow
9 May	London
23 May	Brentford
30 May	Norwich
	Shotley
	Ipswich
1–3 June	Durham
10 June	Streatham
20 June	Glasgow
4 July	Belfast
12 July	Middlesborough
	Thornley
	Easington
25–27 July	Oldham
	Manchester
	Durham
	Billingham, Stockton
1–4 August	Wigton
	Whitehaven, Manchester
30 August	London
3 September	Sedgefield
8 September	Balmoral
9–10 September	Preston
	Blackpool
18 September	London
28 September–3 October	Beswick
	Blackpool
14 October	London
17 October	Belfast
18 October	Durham
	Newton Aycliffe
	Darlington
24 October	Nottingham
31 October	London

European Council

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the German Chancellor on proposals for reform of the European Council; and whether it is his policy to pursue a joint position on these matters. [80043]

The Prime Minister: I wrote a joint letter with Chancellor Schröder in February on proposals for Council reform. These ideas were taken forward in the agreement reached at the Seville European Council.

We are now further developing these ideas with all our European partners.

India

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his recent meeting at Chequers with the Prime Minister of India; and when he next plans to visit India. [79930]

The Prime Minister: I met the Indian Prime Minister on 12 October 2002. We had a wide-ranging discussion of international and bilateral issues. I stressed the importance of the bilateral relationship and welcomed the progress made on implementing the New Delhi Declaration signed during my visit to India in January this year. I also reiterated the UK's support for India's permanent membership of the UN Security Council. I congratulated Mr. Vajpayee on the successful Jammu and Kashmir elections. We discussed next steps in the region. I also raised the consular cases of Ian Stillman, Peter Bleach and the British citizens killed in Gujarat earlier this year.

I also refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 604W.

I currently have no plans to visit India.

London Mayor

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the Mayor of London in an official capacity. [79926]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals, including the Mayor of London. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings, under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

European Convention on the Future of Europe

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the European Convention on the Future of Europe. [79929]

The Prime Minister: The convention is making good progress. President Valery Giscard d'Estaing's outline constitutional treaty, published last week, provides a useful framework for the next stage in the discussions. The convention is expected to conclude in June 2003.

Swaminarayan Hindu Mission

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission concerning their dispute with Brent Council. [80053]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware I have received two letters from the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission on this issue.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* Parliamentary Questions and *(b)* letters to him from hon. Members in this session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79948]

The Prime Minister: No parliamentary questions remain unanswered.

Since June 2001 I have received approximately 3,638 letters from Members of Parliament including invitations and requests concerning constituency matters which were dealt with as appropriate.

I have received about 800,000 items of post since June 2001, and my office has worked hard to deal with them as efficiently as possible.

Missile Defence Programme

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions took place during his most recent meeting with President Bush about the United Nations national missile defence programme; what agreements were reached; and if he will make a statement. [79653]

The Prime Minister: President Bush and I did not discuss missile defence when we met on 7 September. It remains the case that there has been no formal US request for the use of UK facilities for missile defence purposes. If a request is received, the Government will consider it. But the Government would only agree to the use of UK facilities if satisfied that the overall security of the UK and NATO would be enhanced.

House of Lords Appointment Commission

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration the House of Lords Appointment Commission has been asked to give to increasing the representation of Sikhs in the House of Lords. [80368]

The Prime Minister: The criteria for assessing nominations for the House of Lords are set by the House of Lords Appointment Commission. These include outstanding records of personal success and achievement in their own chosen fields; independence and integrity; commitment to the highest standards of public life and the ability to contribute effectively to the work of the House of Lords. While the Appointment Commission has not been asked to consider increasing the representation of any faith group, clearly individuals from the different faith groups who meet the criteria will be considered in the usual way.

Sikh Community

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Prime Minister, which Government Departments have put in place mechanisms to monitor the provision of public services to the British Sikh community. [80371]

The Prime Minister: As I have indicated in reply to earlier questions, as part of the Government's commitment to diversity a number of Departments employ diversity and equality advisers. These liaise with various communities on policy, operational and employment matters. Some of these, for example in the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Defence, focus specifically on issues relevant to the Sikh community.

The Government are committed to the provision of public services for all. Areas of specific concern to the Sikh community can be raised in a range of fora, including Race Equality Councils and with the appropriate Minister.

Ministerial Assessment

David Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the procedures under which he receives reports from civil servants on the performance of junior ministers. [79904]

The Prime Minister: Section 1 of the *Ministerial Code* sets out the procedures relating to the accountability of Ministers. Civil servants do not provide me with performance reports on junior Ministers although there is provision for issues to be raised with me through the Cabinet Secretary.

TRANSPORT

Aviation Fuel

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 158W, on aviation fuel, if he will estimate the total United Kingdom air passenger demand in 2030 if agreement is reached in ICAO to impose an international tax on aviation fuel equivalent to the current rate of duty on unleaded petrol and to impose a sales tax of 17.5 per cent on all airline tickets. [78548]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Imposing a tax on aviation equivalent to the current rate of duty on unleaded fuel in the UK has not been considered in ICAO and the Government has given an undertaking not to remove existing zero rating for VAT purposes of air transport. Imposing such tax increases on aviation would go well beyond what is justified on the basis of evidence of its environmental costs.

Cliffe Airport

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason residents of South Essex with homes falling under the Cliffe Airport 5th runway, were not consulted on the Cliffe Airway proposal. [78590]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are consulting very widely across the UK on the future of air transport.

The consultation documents published in July are available to everyone at no cost. They can be found on a special website, www.airconsult.gov.uk, or by contacting our distribution centre either by writing to DfT Free Literature, PO Box No 236, Wetherby LS23 7NB or by telephoning 0845 100 5554. In addition, my department sent complementary copies of the summary consultation papers to those local residents who would be most directly affected by any of the possible options.

We want to receive as many responses as possible from the public. We will take all views into account before any decisions are taken and announced in the air transport White Paper next year.

The White Paper will set out a framework for proposed airport development. Before any development could proceed it would be subject to the land use planning system and all interested parties would have a further opportunity to represent their views as part of that process.

Car Sharing

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with agencies of Local Agenda 21 on the subject of car sharing. [79336]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* The review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, which involves Departments across Whitehall, will include consultation with key stakeholders including Agenda 21 groups.

Potters Bar Rail Accident

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress has been made in addressing the findings and recommendations of the Health and Safety Executive concerning the Potters Bar derailment; what steps have been taken in respect of nuts on the adjustable stretcher bars of points in the Potters Bar area; and if he will make a statement. [79918]

Mr. Jamieson: The progress report published by the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) Potters Bar Investigation Board on 4 July 2002 made a number of recommendations to improve the safety of railway points on Railtrack (now Network Rail), its maintenance contractors and HSE's HM Railway Inspectorate (HMRI).

The Investigation Board was informed by Railtrack of measures it was taking to improve safety, including the provision of guidance on good practice for safely setting up and maintaining adjustable stretcher bars.

Network Rail has also promised to complete by next month an in-depth design review of railway points using adjustable stretcher bars as recommended by the Investigation Board. It has also given a commitment to lead a workshop with its contractors to promote a determined and consistent approach to progressing the Investigation Board's recommendations.

The Investigation Board has considered the initial responses from Railtrack and its contractors and will consider the more detailed responses once Network Rail has completed the in-depth design review.

HMRI inspectors will be carrying out further spot checks on a sample of points as a follow-up exercise to the one carried out in June.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he expects to receive the next interim report from the Health and Safety Executive on the Potters Bar rail accident. [79472]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have advised that, subject to the completion of all necessary technical inquiries, the Potters Bar Investigation Board expects to publish its next progress report in the first quarter of 2003. However, consistent with its published terms of reference, the Board will consider putting into the public domain beforehand any information it judges to be in the interests of furthering the cause of improved rail safety. The Board meets regularly and reviews this question very carefully.

Air Transport

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many copies of the *(a)* main document and *(b)* summary of the (i) National and (ii) regional consultation documents on Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom have been issued in hard copy as a result of each exhibition which has taken place to promote the consultation. [78810]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has issued to date, in total, around 111,000 copies of the main consultation documents and 156,000 copies of the summary documents for the seven areas of the UK. These figures include the documents distributed at the exhibitions across the country. We do not have a breakdown for the number of documents issued at individual exhibitions.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the cost to his Department has been of *(a)* the exhibitions promoting the consultation documents on the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom and *(b)* the printing costs relating to the publication of the consultation documents. [78811]

Mr. Jamieson: The cost of the exhibitions which have taken place at the major airport sites across the UK during the consultation period is around £1.1 million to date. The programme of exhibitions is not yet complete, due to high public demand. The printing costs relating to the publication of the consultation documents are around £480,000.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many responses had been received by 28 October in response to *(a)* the consultation document, Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: A National Consultation *(b)* each of the regional consultation documents on the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom, for each region (i) in total and (ii) for each region. [78812]

Mr. Jamieson: To date we have received over 7000 responses to the NOP questionnaire and over 23,000 letters in total across the UK. This is set out by region in the table.

Region	*NOP Responses*	*Letters received*
Scotland	464	29
South East	3949	8700
Midlands	1786	15000
North of England	983	39
South West	546	24
Wales	29	7
Northern Ireland	51	8
Total	7808	23801

Tom Blake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many copies of the *(a)* main document and *(b)* summary of the consultation documents (i) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: A National Consultation, (ii) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: North of England, (iii) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South West, (iv) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: Midlands, (v) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: Wales and (vi) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East have been *(A)* issued in hard copy and *(B)* downloaded from the website. [78813]

Mr. Jamieson: We have so far distributed around 105,750 main consultation documents and 145,700 summary consultation documents. The figures by region for distribution and website downloads are shown in the table.

Region	*Hard copy*		*Website downloads*	
	Main	*Summary*	*Main*	*Summary*
North of England	11,500	27,500	11,000	5,800
South West	5,150	13,700	7,100	7,000
Midlands	33,400	42,600	31,100	25,300
Wales	4,000	5,200	2,000	1,500
South East	47,600	48,000	54,500	56,600
Northern Ireland	4,100	8,700	2,400	1,700
Total	105,750	145,700	108,100	97,900

Dual-use Pathogens

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what mechanisms there are to allow the Government to monitor, regulate and ensure the security of the transport of dual-use pathogens *(a)* within the UK, *(b)* within the EU and *(c)* from the UK to third countries. [79197]

Mr. Spellar: The land transport of infectious substances within Great Britain is regulated by the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Rail Regulations 1996 (SI 1996 No 2089) (as amended), the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road Regulations 1996 (SI 1996 No 2095) (as amended) and the Carriage of Dangerous Goods (Classification, Packaging and Labelling) and Use of Transportable Pressure Receptacles Regulations 1996 (SI 1996 No 2092) (as amended). These regulations are made under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and enforced by the Health and Safety Executive, with support from the police and the Vehicle Inspectorate. Mirror arrangements apply in Northern Ireland. Council Directives 96/49/EC (for rail transport) and 94/55/EC (for road transport) apply to transport between EU Member States, respectively, the provisions of the RID and ADR Agreements governing the international transport of dangerous goods, including infectious substances. Transport between the UK and third countries who are contracting parties to RID or ADR is governed by the detailed requirements set out in those Agreements. The Agreements are reviewed biennially in response to technical progress. Similar provisions apply in air and sea transport through application of the ICAO Technical Instructions and the IMO IMDG Code respectively.

The United Kingdom is at the forefront of an international initiative to draft provisions to enhance the security of dangerous goods in transport, which will apply particularly to the more dangerous infectious substances. We hope that by the end of the year we will see these provisions adopted in the UN's global multi-modal Model Regulations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and by the European Commission, and included in due course in the provisions of the aforementioned Directives.

Congestion Charging

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information is collated by his Department on average traffic speed in central London between 07.00 and 18.30 in each of the past five years; and what estimates he plans to make on the impact of congestion charging from February 2003. [79637]

Mr. Jamieson: Surveys of average traffic speeds were carried out in London until the year 2000 by the Department for Transport. Central, Inner and Outer London were surveyed in turn, and Central London was covered in 1997 and 2000. Figures are not held specifically for the period 07:00 to 18:30. However, in Central London the average morning peak (07:45 to 09:15) speed during 1997 was 10.0 mph and in 2000 it was 9.9 mph.

Since 3 July 2000, Transport for London have taken over responsibility for running the London speed surveys, as well as estimating the impact of congestion charging on traffic speeds in London from February 2003.

Matlock-Buxton Railway Line

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to re-open the railway line from Matlock to Buxton; and if he will make a statement. [79632]

Mr. Jamieson: A feasibility study, funded by Derbyshire County Council, the East Midlands Development Agency, the Countryside Agency and the Strategic Rail Authority, is currently considering the potential for re-opening the line. No decisions have yet been made.

Bletchley-Bicester Railway Line

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to bring into use the railway line from Bletchley to Bicester; and if he will make a statement. [79631]

Mr. Jamieson: The East-West Consortium has submitted a Rail Passenger Partnership bid to the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) for the re-opening of this section of line. The SRA is currently evaluating this bid and anticipates that a decision will be made shortly.

Cycling (London)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the *(a)* number of regular cyclists and *(b)* number of cycle miles travelled in Greater London in each year since 1997. [79633]

Mr. Jamieson: In our National Travel Survey over the period 1999–2001, about 10 per cent. (700,000) residents of Greater London said they cycled at least once a week and about a further 7 per cent. (500,000) said they cycled at least once a month. Figures are not available for single years.

Estimates for pedal cycle traffic in London for the years 1999 to 2001 are estimated to be 340, 320 and 320 million vehicle kilometres respectively. Estimates for 1997 and 1998 will be available by mid-2003.

Rail Franchises

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to change the number of trains operating companies in the South West; [80313]

(2) if he will make a statement on the status of the Wessex franchise, with particular reference to its interaction with the Great Western franchise; [80311]

(3) what discussions he has had with members of the South Western Assembly on the subject of *(a)* the Wessex franchise and *(b)* the Great Western franchise. [80312]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) announced on 6 November its intention to create a new Greater Western rail franchise by no later than 2006. The new franchise will combine the current Great Western Trains, Thames Trains and Wessex Trains franchises into a single franchise. This decision follows extensive consultation with key stakeholders including the South Western Assembly. The SRA also announced a way forward to 2007 for the South West Trains franchise.

Central Railways

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to *(a)* complete and *(b)* publish his response to the Central Railways proposed freight line. [79823]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 304W, to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan).

Better Public Buildings Initiative

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will name the projects the departmental design champion has sponsored as part of the Better Public Buildings initiative; and if he will make a statement on the extent of his personal input in respect of each. [80334]

Mr. Jamieson: The sponsored projects are the New Government Building, Leeds and the Highways Agency's Stonehenge Improvement Project.

Motorway Accidents

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what data is collated by his Department on the incidence of motorway traffic accidents involving left-hand drive heavy goods vehicles; and what proportion of accidents involved the vehicle changing lanes. [80210]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not available.

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will commission research on safety aspects of the use of left-hand drive heavy goods vehicles on motorways, with particular reference to resolving problems resulting from their blind spots. [80209]

Mr. Jamieson: UK research into heavy goods vehicle visibility was used in preparing an amendment to the EU Directive on Rear View Mirrors. This will require new heavy goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes registered within the EU to be fitted with a "close proximity" blind spot mirror on the passenger side. We believe that this will go a long way towards addressing safety concerns over blind spots with left-hand-drive HGVs operating on UK roads.

Uckfield Railway Line

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will place in the Library a copy of the B003 Allen Report on the electrification of the Uckfield line through Edenbridge. [79910]

Mr. Spellar: A summary of this report has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [80360]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport was only set up on 29 May 2002.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for ransport, how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to him from hon. Members in this Session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79946]

Mr. Jamieson: The information provided is in respect of the period since the formation of my Department on 29 May 2002.

No parliamentary questions remain unanswered.

The Cabinet Office publishes a report to Parliament on an annual basis, setting out the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. The Report for 2001 was published on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 677W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

At 6 November 2002, my Department had received 3,649 letters from hon. Members, of which 23 remain unanswered after one month from date of receipt, where (i) 12 were between 1 and 2 months old from the date of receipt and (ii) 11 were between 2 and 3 months old from the date of receipt.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what public consultations have been commenced by his Department in each month since 20 July; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80276]

Mr. Jamieson: A list of the public consultations by the Department since 20 July 2002 is listed below, including the closing dates for responses and the website address of each document. The list is based on central records and reflects the public consultations undertaken within the areas for which the Department is currently responsible.

Subject	Title	Start date	Closing date	Web site
Aviation	The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: A National Consultation	23 July 02	30 Nov 02	http://www.aviation.dft.gov.uk/consult/airconsult/index.htm.
Aviation	Proposals for implementing European Directive 2002/30/EC on rules and procedures for introducing noise-related operating restrictions at Community airports	31 July 02	31 Oct 02	http://www.aviation.dft.gov.uk/consult/noise/index.htm.
Railways	Creating a regulatory board for railways	2 Oct 02	6 Nov 02	http://www.railways.dft.gov.uk/consult/regboard/index.htm.
Road, Vehicles and Road Safety	Restructuring and increase in fees for PSV international operations	29 Oct 02	10 Jan 03	http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk/consult/psv/index.htm.
Road, Vehicles and Road Safety	Mobile Phones and Driving—Proposal for an offence of using a handheld mobile phone while driving	20 Aug 02	25 Nov 02	http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk/consult/mobiles/index.htm.
Road, Vehicles and Road Safety	Retreaded and Part Worn Tyres Proposed Amendment to the Motor Vehicle Tyres (Safety) Regulations 1994	23 Aug 02	25 Nov 02	http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk/consult/retreaded/index.htm.
Road, Vehicles and Road Safety	Amendment to the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 to permit the use of longer buses in the UK in accordance with EC Directive 2002/7/EC	23 Aug 02	15 Nov 02	http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk/vehicle/ria/roadvehicles/index.htm
Local Transport	Bus Lane Enforcement—Public Consultation on the Proposed Bus Lane Contraventions	24 July 02	6 Sept 02	http://www.local-transport.dft.gov.uk/consult/buslanes/index.htm.
Local Transport	The Flexible Future A consultative paper on changes to local bus service registration and bus service operators grant requirements to allow more flexibly routed services	9 Aug 02	1 Nov 02	http://www.local-transport.dft.gov.uk/consult/flexibus/index.htm.
Local Transport	Review of Bus Subsidies: Consultation Paper	6 Aug 02	25 Oct 02	http://www.local-transport.dft.gov.uk/consult/busubsid/index.htm
Street Work	Diversionary Works Code Consultation	25 July 02	18 October	http://www.street-works.dft.gov.uk/consult/divworks/index.htm.

DEFENCE

Nato Deployments

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what UK facilities have been made available to NATO forces for out of area activities during the past year. [79646]

Mr. Hoon: No United Kingdom facilities have been made available to NATO forces for out of area activities during the past year.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of pensions offered to service personnel of other states who participated in UK nuclear tests. [80287]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of financial support from the New Zealand Government for the nuclear test veterans of that country to support research into the health impact of UK nuclear tests. [80286]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has made no assessment of financial support provided by the New Zealand Government to New Zealand test veterans to support research into the health impact of British nuclear tests. Such funding is a matter for the New Zealand Government.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to him from hon. Members in this Session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79940]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

A400M

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart about the future of the A400M programme. [80016]

Mr. Hoon: I last met my French counterpart on 4 October when we discussed a number of issues including the A400M programme. We agreed on the importance of that programme and the need to launch it as soon as possible.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what indications he has received that Germany will order fewer than *(a)* 73 and *(b)* 60 A400M aircraft; [80014]

(2) what assessment he has made of the increasing costs of the A400M programme, based on a reduced number of German orders; and if he will make a statement; [80015]

(3) when he last met the Defence Minister of Germany to discuss the A440M programme; and if he will make a statement; [80017]

(4) what the minimum number is of A400M aircraft that Germany must order, for the UK to continue supporting the A400M programme; and how long he is prepared to wait for the minimum number of German orders. [80013]

Mr. Hoon: I had a meeting with my German counterpart on 5 November when we discussed a range of defence topics, including the A400M programme. We both recognised the importance of the A400M programme and the need to launch it as soon as possible.

The German government has made no final decision on whether it will need to change its previously stated requirement for 73 aircraft. It would therefore be premature to speculate on the impact of a reduced German order on the cost of the programme.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if she will make a statement on what progress is being made on the delivery of the A400M; and what discussions she has had with the German Government to discuss the contractual situation. [41127]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ballistic Missile Defence

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his statement in the debate on defence in the world on 17 October 2062, *Official Report*, columns 503–04W, how he plans to facilitate *(a)* public and *(b)* parliamentary discussion of ballistic missile defence and the future uses of RAF Fylingdales. [80366]

Mr. Hoon: As I said in the debate on 17 October, I intend to make available to Parliament and the public in the coming months some analytical and discussion material. We will be ready to discuss the issues in Parliament at the appropriate time.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department spent on technological and other appraisals of ballistic missile defence options, in each year since 1997. [80356]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 849W–50W to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will answer the question of 22 July from the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford. [79868]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is still being collated. Once this is available, I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gulf War

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many requests by service personnel for access to their medical records there have been since the Gulf War; and if he will make a statement; [78280]

(2) how many requests by service personnel for access to their medical records since the Gulf War have been granted; what reasons have been given for refusing service personnel access to their military medical records; and if he will make a statement. [78281]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the incidence of reduced blood levels of the paraoxenase enzyme in Gulf War veterans. [78606]

Mr. Ingram MP: A non-Ministry of Defence funded study published in September 2000 showed that when compared to a control group of some selected civilians who were well, self-selected ill United Kingdom Gulf veterans had: *(a)* a lower concentration of paraoxonase and *(b)* its activity was less than 50 per cent. of that found in the control group. The level of paraoxonase found showed little variation among the Gulf veterans studied and no link to the severity of symptoms or to genetic composition was identified. The Ministry of Defence has since part-funded a study to confirm, or otherwise, the earlier findings which includes United Kingdom Gulf veterans, Bosnia veterans and non-deployed veterans. The study is complete and it is expected that the results will be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of magnetic resonance spectroscopy brain scanning as applied to UK Gulf War veterans. [78605]

Mr. Ingram: Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy (MRS) is a non-invasive radiological technique. It measures intracellular concentrations of specific abundant chemicals in small areas of the brain and is used to examine brain activity patterns and to identify very localised areas of damage within the brain.

MRS has not been used in Gulf veterans' illnesses research funded by the Ministry of Defence. Some patients who attended the Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme have been referred to specialist neurologists who may have used this procedure. Gulf veterans also may have had MRS scans during investigations carried out during their health care under the National Health Service or Defence Medical Services.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the rate of death of *(a)* UK Gulf War veterans and *(b)* other members of the public by motor vehicle accidents was in each year since 1992. [78604]

Dr. Moonie: The mortality rates per 10,000 personnel to Gulf veterans due to motor vehicle accidents during the ten-year period 1992–2001 are given below. For comparison purposes the data for a similar sized cohort randomly sampled from United Kingdom armed forces personnel in Service on 1 January 1991 who were not deployed to the Gulf, stratified according to age, gender, Service, Officer status, regular/reservist status and a proxy marker for fitness are also given. Data from the Office for National Statistics for the general population of England and Wales with the same age and gender profile, taking into account the ageing of the Gulf cohort, is also provided.

Year	*Gulf*	*Era*	*England and Wales*
1992	3.4	1.9	1.7
1993	2.1	1.1	1.3
1994	1.5	1.9	1.2
1995	2.4	0.6	1.1
1996	3.2	1.5	1.1
1997	1.3	2.2	1.1
1998	1.5	1.7	1.0
1999	1.5	1.5	1.0
2000	0.9	1.3	1.0
2001	1.3	0.4	0.9
Ten-year mean	1.9	1.4	1.2

A number of possible explanations have been put forward to explain the excess mortality rate above for Gulf veterans. These include that the veterans may have had some sort of neurological impairment caused by an exposure in the Gulf, that their perception of risk may have been altered by the experience of conflict or that this may have been a disguised form of suicide. We are discussing with the scientific community how best to conduct an analysis of the factors underlying the figures.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces have retired from their employment on medical grounds in each year since their service in the Gulf war; and what the average annual rate of medical retirements has been in the last 10 years. [79530]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Army Regiments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Army regiments are running at more than five per cent. below their recommended complement of enlisted men; and if he will make a statement; [78275]

(2) how many Army regiments are running at more than 10 per cent. below their recommended complement of enlisted men; and if he will make a statement. [78283]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held by Regiment, but by Arms/Corps. Those Arms/Corps running at more than five per cent below their recommended compliment of enlisted men are shown in the table below:

	Percentage
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	−37.79
Army Air Corps	−15.81
Royal Army Veterinary Corps	−13.99
Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers	−11.99
Army Physical Training Corps	−10.72
Royal Logistic Corps	−10.06
Royal Army Medical Corps	−8.50
Corps of Army Music	−7.87
Royal Engineers	−7.62
Adjutant General's Corps (Staff and Personnel Support)	−6.47
Royal Signals	−6.12

Those Arms/Corps running at more than ten per cent. below their recommended compliment of enlisted men are shown in the table below:

	Percentage
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	−37.79
Army Air Corps	−15.81
Royal Army Veterinary Corps	−13.99
Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers	−11.99
Army Physical Training Corps	−10.72
Royal Logistic Corps	−10.06

Enlisted men are taken to be all other ranks. All figures are as at 1 September 2002 and for trained personnel only.

Medical Reservists

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical specialists, and in which specialisations, there are in the Reserves. [78319]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to include medical staff in a call up of reservists in respect of planned military action against terrorism. [78577]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 5W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen). A decision to call-out medical reservists for any future military operations would be made at that time.

UK-owned Equipment

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions his Department has had with the governments of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman concerning the operation of UK-owned and operated equipment of Israeli origin from their territories. [78465]

Dr. Moonie: No such discussions have taken place.

Armed Forces' Equipment

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by country the manufacturing supply source of *(a)* boots and *(b)* berets used by United Kingdom armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [78574]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently 12 companies manufacturing boots (ranging from safety boots to combat boots and uniform dress boots) of which ten are United Kingdom based, one Spanish and the other Italian. Our existing stocks of berets were procured from two United Kingdom based companies. We are currently evaluating tenders from a number of UK and overseas-based companies for a new contract to supply berets for UK Armed Forces.

Warships

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when each of the Type 42 destroyers will decommission. [78657]

Dr. Moonie: On current plans the operational decommissioning dates of each Type 42 Destroyer in the Royal Navy are as follows:

Type 42 Destroyer	*HMS*	*Planned Operational Decommissioning date*
Batch 1	Cardiff	2008
	Newcastle	2007
	Glasgow	2010
Batch 2	Exeter	2011
	Southampton	2012
	Nottingham	2012
	Liverpool	2010
Batch 3	Manchester	2013
	Gloucester	2013
	Edinburgh	2014
	York	2014

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of HMS Portland, HMS Kent and HMS St. Albans was. [78662]

Dr. Moonie: The costs of HMS Portland, HMS Kent and HMS St. Albans, including construction and installation of on-board systems, such as weapons and communications are shown in the table below:

Ships	*£ million*
HMS Kent	128.062
HMS Portland	124.918
HMS St. Albans	125.659

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make a decision on the Warship Modernisation Project; how the announcement will be made; and if he will make a statement. [44735]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the new STOVL Joint Strike Fighter aircraft. [78973]

Dr. Moonie: We announced on 30 September 2002 that the Short Take-Off/Vertical Landing (STOVL) variant of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) has been selected to meet our Future Joint Combat Aircraft (FJCA) requirement. This decision represents a major step forward for the United Kingdom's future expeditionary air power capability, and builds on our unique and valuable knowledge of STOVL aircraft acquired during nearly four decades of operations with Harrier on land and at sea.

The announcement has also been welcomed by British industry, which is playing a key role in the JSF programme and will help ensure that the UK retains its leading position in a major area of aerospace technology. Indeed, industry estimates that its involvement could be worth up to £27 billion over the whole life of the programme, creating or securing some 8,500 jobs.

Future Integrated Soldier Technology

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the Future Integrated Soldier Technology programme. [78979]

Dr. Moonie: The final stage of a competition to choose a Prime Contractor for the Assessment Phase of the Future Integrated Soldier Technology programme is currently underway, involving BAE SYSTEMS Ltd and Thales Optronics Ltd. Selection of a single Prime Contractor is planned for early 2003.

Rotorcraft

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Royal Navy's Surface Combatant Maritime Rotorcraft requirement. [78978]

Dr. Moonie: The Surface Combatant Maritime Rotorcraft (SCMR) requirement is to deliver a surveillance and attack capability in open ocean and littoral areas in support of maritime, joint or combined operations using a maritime helicopter operating from assigned frigates and destroyers. The requirement will include targeting, Anti-Surface and Anti-Submarine weapon delivery, and battle damage assessment. In addition, it will provide Search and Rescue (SAR), humanitarian support and constabulary capabilities.

SCMR will succeed and enhance the capability currently provided by the Maritime Lynx Mk3 and Mk8 helicopters. These have, for decades, provided excellent service on our frigates and destroyers, but are nearing the end of their useful life. SCMR will be capable of operating from Type 23 frigates, the Future Surface Combatant, and Type 45 destroyers. SCMR is currently in its Assessment Phase and is planned to be phased into service during the second half of the decade.

Harassment

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many members of the Army indicated when last questioned that they believe that *(a)* harassment, *(b)* discrimination and *(c)* bullying are problems in (i) their immediate area of work and (ii) the Army as a whole; what percentage of those responding this represents; what percentage of actual strength this represents; and if he will make a statement. [78634]

Mr. Ingram: In response to the latest Army Continuous Attitude Survey, 197 members of those surveyed indicated they believed that harassment, discrimination or bullying are problems within their immediate work area; this represents 11 per cent. of those who responded and 5 per cent. of those surveyed. In addition, 878 members of the Army indicated, in the same survey, that they believed harassment, discrimination and bullying are problems within the British Army; this represents 43 per cent. of those who responded and some 22 per cent. of those surveyed.

The latest survey was undertaken in March–April 2002 and sent to a 4 per cent. random sample of the trained Army (excluding Gurkhas and Full Time Reserve Service); 3,978 questionnaires were sent out and 2,037 were returned.

Future Aircraft Carrier Programme

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when an announcement will be made as to the successful tender for the Future Aircraft Carrier programme. [79271]

Dr. Moonie: Stage 2 of the CVF Assessment phase completes on 20 November. We then intend to select a preferred contractor not on the basis of a traditional bid analysis but through an assessment of the contractors' performance and output since the start of the Assessment phase in November 1999. An announcement on the preferred contractor is scheduled for early next year.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Future Aircraft Carrier programme. [79268]

Dr. Moonie: The Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) programme is progressing well and the recent announcement of the innovative adaptable design is evidence of this. Risk reduction and design work is continuing and we remain on course to select our preferred contractor early next year and approve investment in the build programme at the end of 2003. The In Service Dates of the two ships remain 2012 and 2015 respectively.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs he estimates will be created through the design and manufacture of the Future Aircraft Carriers in the UK. [79270]

Dr. Moonie: It is still too early in the Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) programme to make an accurate forecast of the number of jobs that will be created or sustained by the CVF programme. Much will depend on the shipbuild strategy adopted by the preferred prime contractor and the split of work between the participating construction and final assembly facilities. However, taking into account the supply chain, the programme may involve around 10,000 jobs throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aircraft will be for the Future Aircraft Carrier programme. [79269]

Dr. Moonie: The primary aircraft for the Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) will be the Joint Combat Aircraft. The Lockheed Martin Joint Strike Fighter has been identified as the aircraft with the best potential to fulfil that role and this was reinforced by the announcement on 30 September that we had selected the Short Take Off Vertical Landing variant to operate from CVF. The ships will also carry Maritime Airborne Surveillance and Control aircraft and helicopters from all three services in a variety of roles.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what strategies his Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79289]

Dr. Moonie: Equality of opportunity for all staff is a key feature of Civil Service employment. The Ministry of Defence's personnel and employment policies and procedures have been subject to equality-proofing, including the removal of any unfair discrimination on the basis of age. To underpin this, the MOD has a programme of action on equality and diversity involving the training and development of line and personnel managers, and the monitoring of recruitment, selection and performance management statistics. Training in equal opportunities is mandatory for all recruitment panel members.

In addition, the MOD, like other Departments, has conducted a thorough review of its age retirement policy in light of the Government's commitment to tackle ageism in the workplace as set out in the Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment published in 1999.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of new recruits to his Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79301]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the tables:

		Under 50	*50 and over*	*Total*	*% Over 50*
Financial Year 2001–2002	Ministry of Defence	4,443	1,289	5,732	22.5
	Trading Funds	1,141	223	1,374	16.2
	Total	5,584	1,512	7,106	21.3

		Under 50	50 and over	Total	% Over 50
Financial Year 2000–2001	Ministry of Defence	5,200	1,348	6,548	20.6
	Trading Funds	1,134	116	1,251	9.3
	Total	6,334	1,464	7,799	18.8

Notes:
1. Figures exclude casual and Royal Fleet Auxiliary staff.
2. The following methods of recruitment have been included recruitment by CSC, by Department, Re-instatement/Re-employment and unknown.
3. Where the parts do not equal the sum a number of staff with "unknown" age were identified.
4. Financial years run from 1 April to the 31 March.

Invincible Class Carriers

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the steps being taken by the Government to ensure that bids to build the replacement for the Invincible Class Carriers take account of UK dry dock facilities; and if he will make a statement. [78989]

Dr. Moonie: In line with Government policy on warship construction the Royal Navy's two new Future Aircraft Carriers (CVFs) will be built in the United Kingdom. This is clearly understood by both of the candidate prime contractors for CVF—BAE SYSTEMS and Thales—and as part of their work to date they have assessed the capabilities of a number of sites throughout the United Kingdom that have the potential to participate in the build (construction and outfitting of modules or blocks of the vessel) and assembly (the joining together of the blocks into a whole ship in a suitable dry dock). No final decisions have yet been made.

Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent in recruiting staff to his Department in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south east in each year since 1997. [78562]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Aircraft Landings

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian aircraft landings and take-offs were recorded at RAF Machrihanish during each of the last five years. [78734]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not hold records of civilian aircraft movements. The Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd lease part of the RAF Machrihanish site, known as Campbeltown Airport, and are not able to provide the information sought.

Research Projects

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list research projects his Department *(a)* has funded in the last five years and *(b)* is funding into the health outcomes of (i) service personnel who participated in UK nuclear tests and (ii) their offspring. [79188]

Dr. Moonie: In the last five years the Ministry of Defence has funded a study by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) into the incidence of multiple myeloma, other cancers and other causes of death amongst nuclear test veterans. This study follows on from two earlier studies, the results of which were published in 1988 and 1993. The results of this third study are expected to be published early next year. Funding is also provided to the NRPB for the maintenance of a database that has been used during the compilation of these studies.

No funding has been provided for health studies of the offspring of nuclear test veterans. Current information on radiation health effects suggests that studies of cancer among people exposed to radiation are likely to prove a more sensitive means of detecting such effects than studies of their children. There is no scientific or medical evidence that shows that the health or other physical problems suffered by the offspring of nuclear test veterans can be attributed to their father's or grandfather's participation in the test programme.

Afghanistan

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost to date is of maintaining British troops in Afghanistan. [79985]

Mr. Ingram: The cost of Operations in Afghanistan for 2001–2002 was estimated to be £261 million and this was published in Spring Supplementary Estimates.

I will write to my hon. Friend shortly concerning expenditure in 2001–2002 and 2002–2003 and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of UK operations in Afghanistan has been since 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [57603]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Diversification Council

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Defence Diversification Council has been established; and if he will make a statement. [79874]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Diversification Council is currently being set-up. It will be chaired by my hon. Friend, the Under Secretary of State for Defence, and will include representation from the Department of Trade and Industry, the Regional Assemblies, Trade Unions and Industry.

Defence Export Services

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when Mr. Tony Edwards resigned as Head of Defence Export Services. [79875]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gates of Remembrance

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with representatives of the Gates of Remembrance Appeal; and what discussions he has had with the *(a)* Royal British Legion, *(b)* Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association, *(c)* Army Benevolent Fund, *(d)* RAF Association, *(e)* Royal Navy Association and *(f)* War Widows Association of Great Britain about that appeal. [79839]

Mr. Ingram: Although no specific discussions have taken place with representatives from the Gates of Remembrance Appeal numerous wide ranging discussions have taken place with those other bodies mentioned. In accordance with the long established policy of successive Governments, the cost of erecting war memorials or their subsequent maintenance is not met from public funds but from private donations or public subscription.

Scientific Advisory Council

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the members of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council, and in each case his or her employer. [79829]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Scientific Advisory Council is a Non-Departmental Public Body; it consists of an Independent chairman and eight other independents. In addition a number of senior Ministry of Defence officials are members of the Council.

Independent Chairman

Professor A Ledwith	Retired

Independent Members

Professor R Needham	Microsoft Research Ltd (Cambridge)
Dr. D J Price	Rolls Royce—Marine
Mr. P J Stein	Roke Manor Research Ltd
Dr. A L Mears	QinetiQ plc
Dr. L V Bennett	Risk Solutions
Professor P G Blain	University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Professor A J Kinloch	Imperial College, University of London
Professor R Voles	R V Consultancy

Official Members from MoD and OGDs

Air Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup
Lt Gen R C Menzies
Mr. G H B Jordan
Mr. M Earwicker
Mr. P Roper,
Mr. P D Ewins
Professor D King CSA to the Government
Dr. A Keddy Department of Trade & Industry

PFI Projects

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* start and *(b)* end dates are of the
(i) material handling equipment, (ii) TAFMIS, (iii) defence fixed telecommunications service, (iv) hawk simulator, (v) attack helicopters training-Apache simulator, (vi) defence intelligence system, (vii) Tornado GR4 simulator, (viii) naval communications, (ix) RAF Sentry E3D aircrew, (x) ASTUTE training service,
(xi) heavy equipment transporters, (xii) strategic sealift (ro-ro ferries) and (xiii) field electrical power supplies PFI projects and contracts. [78361]

Mr. Ingram: The start and end dates for the specified PFI projects are shown below:

	Project Name	*Contract signed*	*Service start date*	*Contract end year*
i	Materials Handling Equipment	May 2002	August 2002	2010
Ii	TAFMIS	August 1996	August 1996	2006
Iii	Defence Fixed Telecommunications Service (DFTS)	July 1997	June 1998[1]	2007
Iv	Hawk Simulator	December 1997	December 1999	2015
V	Attack Helicopters Training-Apache Simulator	July 1998	January 2002	2028
Vi	Defence Intelligence System	June 1999	October 1999	2006
Vii	Tornado GR4 Simulator	June 1999	Not yet started	2031
Viii	Royal Navy Fleet Communications Service	June 2000	Not yet started	2027
Ix	RAF Sentry E3D Aircrew—(E3D Simulator)	August 2000	February 2002	2030
X	ASTUTE Training Service	November 2001	Not yet started	2031
Xi	Heavy Equipment Transporters	December 2001	Not yet started	2024
Xii	Strategic Sealift (Ro-Ro Ferries)	June 2002	Not yet started	2024
Xiii	Field Electrical Power Supplies	July 2002	Not yet started	2022

Note:
[1] The exact Service Start date for DFTS cannot be specified as the contract was subject to a one year Transition Period whilst the existing Networks where transferred to BT.

Deepcut Barracks

Mr. Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what professional mental health assistance is given to recruits at the Deepcut barracks; and if he will make a statement. [79995]

Mr. Ingram: The medical centre at Deepcut barracks provides recruits with primary health care. The medical centre's establishment comprises a Civilian Medical Practitioner and full time practice nurse who look after patients' medical problems, both physical and mental. Should further referral for diagnosis and/or

management of a mental health problem be considered necessary, referral would normally be to the Community Psychiatric Department in Aldershot, where Consultant Psychiatrist and Community Psychiatric Nursing services are available. At weekends, urgent cases would be referred to the Duchess of Kent Psychiatric Hospital at Catterick.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Mr. Llewellyn Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what papers have been published *(a)* in referred journals and *(b)* as departmental monographs on the health impact on observers of British atmospheric nuclear weapons tests since 1990; and if he will place copies of each in the Library. [79967]

Dr. Moonie: In December 1993 the report was published of a study carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) on behalf of the Ministry of Defence entitled *Mortality and Cancer Incidence 1952–1990 in UK Participants in the UK Atmospheric Nuclear Weapon Tests and Experimental Programmes*. Findings from the study were published after peer review in the *British Medical Journal*, Volume 307, pages 1530–5, dated December 1993. A copy of the NRPB report is already available in the Library of the House.

The MOD has not published any monographs on this subject.

European Rapid Reaction Force

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance his Department has provided foreign countries to develop tank ammunition and weaponry composed of depleted uranium, and depleted uranium components; and if he will make a statement. [65043]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent progress has been made toward the establishment of a European Rapid Reaction Force; and what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts regarding the issue. [79972]

Mr. Hoon: There is no standing European Rapid Reaction Force. Under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the EU will undertake crisis management operations where NATO as a whole is not engaged. Forces for these operations will be provided voluntarily by Member States, and in some cases by others. (The same arrangement applies for NATO and UN crisis management operations.)

I discuss ESDP with European counterparts frequently. EU Defence Ministers last met collectively to discuss ESDP and other matters on 4–5 October.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much depleted uranium was used in bombing campaigns by UK forces in *(a)* Kosovo during the recent conflict, *(b)* Serbia during the conflict over Kosovo and *(c)* Afghanistan in 2001–02. [79695]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Depleted Uranium

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what stocks of weapons containing depleted uranium are held in *(a)* United Kingdom bases and *(b)* by United Kingdom forces operating in Iraq. [79654]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholding details in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much depleted uranium was used in bombing campaigns by United Kingdom forces in *(a)* the 1990–91 Gulf War and *(b)* bombing campaigns over Iraq since 1991. [79741]

Mr. Ingram: No depleted uranium was used in bombing campaigns by United Kingdom forces in the 1990–1991 Gulf Conflict or in bombing campaigns over Iraq since 1991.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has collated on the effects of depleted uranium exposure on the *(a)* military personnel and *(b)* civilian population in Iraq since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [79655]

Mr. Ingram: Many independent reports have been produced that consider the battlefield effects of using depleted uranium (DU) munitions, but none has found widespread DU contamination sufficient to affect the health of the general population or deployed personnel.

The Ministry of Defence has no information on exposure of Iraqi military personnel or civilians to DU. We support proposals by the World Health Organisation to carry out studies to address public health issues in Iraq, including a proposal to explore health effects of environmental risk factors, including DU. The proposals were sent to the Iraq Ministry of Public Health in October 2001 but there has been no response.

3,339 United Kingdom military personnel who served in the Gulf Conflict have now been seen by the Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme (GVMAP). Physicians at the GVMAP examine all those attending for signs of ill health that could be attributed to exposure to DU, but no such evidence has been found to date.

Under the auspices of the independent Depleted Uranium Oversight Board a test for DU in urine is currently being developed and we hope to be able to make it available to all those who wish to be tested in the first half of next year. In parallel with this, we will also carry out an epidemiological study which will examine the link between exposure to DU and health.

No UK troops who served in the Gulf experienced the highest level of DU. However, 33 United States soldiers were exposed to DU when their vehicles were accidentally hit by DU rounds of whom 17 have embedded DU shrapnel. Their health is closely monitored by the US Government and so far has shown no signs of health problems attributable to DU.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what negotiations have been undertaken with the representatives of nuclear test veterans; what compensation has been offered; what agreement has been reached; and if he will make a statement. [79656]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has had no recent negotiations with representatives of nuclear test veterans. There are no grounds for general compensation for those who participated in the British atmospheric nuclear tests in the 1950s. Veterans who believe that their health has been affected by participation in the tests may apply for a War Pension.

Volunteer Reservists

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many volunteer reservists have enlisted as sponsored reserves since the programme's inspection; and what the recruitment targets were for sponsored reserves when the programme was introduced. [80293]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Installations

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the meaning of the phrase "strengthen the arrangements for consequence management," in paragraph 27 of the Government response to the Defence Select Committee report on Defence and Security in the UK, HC 1230, Session 2001–02, in respect of the vulnerability of nuclear installations to terrorist attack. [80365]

Mr. Ingram: Discussions have taken place involving several Government Departments, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security, the Health and Safety Executive, local authorities, the police and other emergency services, to review the roles and capabilities of those authorities likely to be required to respond to a nuclear incident. Specific importance has been attached to improving co-ordination, communication and the provision of specialist capabilities.

Missile Defence

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates have been made of the cost of United Kingdom participation in national missile defence; and if he will make a statement. [79652]

Mr. Hoon: No precise estimates can be made at this stage. The United States itself has made no decision on the final shape of its overall missile defence architecture and its final costs have yet to be determined. There are no specific options for the deployment of missile defences for the United Kingdom to assess, and no decision has been made on the acquisition of missile defences.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations have been received from research bodies on peace campaigns concerning national missile defence; and if they will be published by his Department. [79657]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence has received numerous representations from various bodies and individuals concerning missile defence; publication of their letters is a matter for them.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have been held with other NATO member states on the cost, timescale and purpose of national missile defence. [79658]

Mr. Hoon: NATO is studying the options for missile defence specifically for the protection of deployed forces, in addition to discussions on a wider range of missile defence issues. The United Kingdom participates in these NATO discussions, and also engages NATO allies bilaterally on missile defence issues as part of our regular contacts.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure has been incurred at *(a)* RAF Fylingdales and *(b)* Menwith Hill in connection with National Missile Defence; and if he will make a statement. [79694]

Mr. Hoon: We have not received a request from the United States to site elements of missile defence in the United Kingdom, and have not incurred expenditure on any works at RAF Fylingdales or RAF Menwith Hill in preparation for, or anticipation of, any such request.

Iraq

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost to date is of maintaining the British force in support of the no-fly zone in Iraq. [79986]

Mr. Ingram: Our records do not separately identify expenditure incurred in maintaining the no fly zones. However, the table below sets out the overall additional expenditure incurred by the Ministry of Defence as a direct result of operations in the Gulf from 1992–1993 onwards.

Year	*£ Million*
1992–93	551
1993–94	179
1994–95	58
1995–96	14
1996–97	6
1997–98	16
1998–99	35
1999–2000	28
2000–01	25
2001–02 (estimate)	22[1]
2002–03 (estimate)	26[1]

Note:
[1] denotes figure calculated on a resource basis; all previous figures are cash-based.

I will write to my hon. Friend concerning expenditure in 2001–2002 and 2002–2003 and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations have been received from the government of Cyprus or members of the Cypriot public concerning the use of United Kingdom sovereign bases in Cyprus in preparation for a future conflict with Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [79650]

Mr. Hoon: No decision regarding the commitment of United Kingdom Armed Forces to any potential conflict in Iraq has yet been taken. Military action is neither imminent nor inevitable.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF sorties over Iraq there have been *(a)* north of 30th parallel and *(b)* south of 30th parallel not covered by the no-fly zone in the last year and what the total volume of explosives dropped in each area was. [79649]

Mr. Hoon: The northern no-fly zone covers the area of Iraq lying north of the 36th parallel. The southern no-fly zone covers the area lying south of the 33rd.

The RAF takes part in Coalition patrols within the no-fly zones. There have been no sorties by the RAF in the free-fly area between the two zones in the last year.

Enron

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* his senior departmental officials have had with Enron and its subsidiaries in the last two years. [32431]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39741]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Television Sets

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* analogue and *(b)* integrated digital television sets his Department has purchased in each of the last 24 months; and if he will make a statement. [38173]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many contracts the Department has with Capita. [38393]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the cost has been of criminal damage to his Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44849]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Thematic Networks Programme

Mr. Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are taken to ensure that EU funding provided to Israel under the Thematic networks programme is not used for projects which could have military applications. [45186]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what costs have been incurred since 19th December 2001 by his Department in connection with the Saville Inquiry; and what his estimate is of the final cost to his Department. [46027]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Radio Spectrum

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 917W, on the radio spectrum, if the review has reported to Ministers; if he will publish the review and any conclusions he has made as a result; and what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and *(b)* the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding his findings. [47739]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Entertainment

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [47052]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas Party; and how many people attended. [61667]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47142]

Dr. Moonie: *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46838]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many special advisers were employed by him *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was for each of those years. [41248]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number and expected cost to his Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43283]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost; [58730]

(2) when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Chichester, tabled on 22 May, on the official travel of departmental and non-departmental special advisers; [58732]

(3) on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [80363]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Accommodation

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel are paying *(a)* nothing or *(b)* a discounted rate for accommodation on the ground of its being below standard; and if he will provide the information for each service. [80330]

Dr. Moonie: *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* service family accommodation and *(b)* single living accommodation units were of (i) grade one, (ii) grade two, (iii) grade three and (iv) grade four standard in each year between 1997 and 2001; and if he will make a statement. [80283]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Reserves

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest figures are for both establishment and strength for each service and their respective reserve forces. [48326]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in his Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03; [50412]

(2) how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years; [42463]

(3) how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42414]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of his departmental budget he estimates is spent on staff pay; and if he will make a statement. [66366]

Mr. Ingram: *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces (Health Care)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many armed forces personnel have been treated in the private sector under *(a)* the ATRA secondary health care initiative, *(b)* the Waiting List Initiative, *(c)* the Rapid Treatment Initiative and *(d)* psychiatric care in each month in 2002; and what the total cost was of that treatment; [80296]

(2) how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* personnel from other ranks received medical treatment in the private sector in (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [80297]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

32 (The Royal) Squadron

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much per hour the RAF charges other Government departments for flying with 32 (The Royal) Squadron;

and what proportion of this charge represents the operational costs of the Squadron at Northolt. [79464]

Dr. Moonie: The hourly charge for 32 (The Royal) Squadron aircraft for the current financial year is:

BAe 146	£1,574 (VAT not applicable)
BAe 125	£740 (plus VAT for United Kingdom internal flights)
Twin Squirrel	£988 (plus VAT for United Kingdom internal flights)

It has been assumed that by "operational costs" the hon. Member is referring to the operating cost of 32 (The Royal) Squadron. As such I can confirm that the charges quoted comprise entirely of the variable cost of operating the aircraft and no fixed operating costs of the Squadron are included. The charges include engineering and airframe support costs, costs incurred for handling and landing at civil airports, fuel and travel and subsistence. Unlike the BAe 125 and 146, the Twin Squirrel is a wholly leased aircraft and the charge applied represents the contracted cost of the aircraft.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander).

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flight hours Government ministers have flown during each year since 1997–98 using the jets of 32 (The Royal) Squadron based at Northolt; and how many flight hours each Government department has utilised each year with the jets of 32 (The Royal) Squadron since 1997–98. [79465]

Mr. Ingram: For information relating to Ministerial use of RAF aircraft, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander).

The information requested regarding flight hours is set out in the table.

Departments	*1997–1998*	*1998–1999*	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*	*2001–2002*	*2002–2003**
FCO	2	6	10	34	35	2
Treasury	0	0	2	0	0	2
Ministry of Defence	2,317	1,991	1,602	1,831	2,006	881
Home Office	0	0	8	6	0	0
Culture Media and Sport	0	1	2	6	0	0
Total	2,319	1,998	1,624	1,877	2,041	885

Notes:
1. Government Department figures do not include Ministers travel.
2. Ministry of Defence use reflects the fact that MOD personnel of all ranks/grades (as necessary) utilise these aircraft in times of crisis and war for operational purposes. Additionally, in peacetime, when not engaged in these tasks, MOD personnel use the resultant irreducible spare capacity for other communication flying tasks.
* Figures to 30 September.

Defence Exports

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the financial and organisational support provided by the Defence Export Services Organisation to UK industry attending the *(a)* Aid and Trade International, Switzerland, *(b)* Pacific 2002, Australia, *(c)* Asian Air, Singapore, *(d)* DEFEXPOL, India, *(e)* FIDEA, Chile, *(f)* DSA Malaysia, Malaysia, *(g)* Eurosatory, France, *(h)* Africa Aerodef, South Africa, *(i)* Defendory, Greece, *(j)* Sofex, Jordan, *(k)* Euronaval, France and *(l)* Euronaval, Chile arms fairs. [76531]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Combat Helmets

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to provide a combat helmet of the same standard of ballistics protection as the rest of NATO forces. [78462]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

C-17 Aircraft

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many C-17 aircraft are being leased; what plans he has to alter that number; and if he will make a statement. [80295]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nimrod MRA 4

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the compensation due from BAE Systems for the slippage in the in-service date of the Nimrod MRA4. [80294]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Missiles

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many missiles were fired out to sea in the UK in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [41875]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Coalfield Constituencies

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what proportion of his Department's establishments are located in coalfield constituencies. [41801]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts agreed by his Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42103]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42161]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Market Testing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the functions of his Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [43004]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the companies from which his Department have obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43413]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43672]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what differential there is between the statutory employment rights enjoyed by *(a)* personnel serving with the Royal Irish Regiment and civilian staff employed by his Department and *(b)* other employees in the United Kingdom. [43566]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Army Utilities Management

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings have accrued from the improvements to the Army's utilities management in Germany. [44221]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of staff at his Department are justices of the peace; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44548]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50286]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the products of PFI projects will be used by private companies and hired out to the armed services when they are needed; and what arrangements will exist for control by the armed forces of such projects. [72915]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible in each of the last five years. [50301]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs

for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if the target was met. [49632]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

UN Peacekeeping

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his written answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 558W, on UN peacekeeping, how many students have to date attended the Army's 10-day international peace support briefing programmes; and from what countries. [50596]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Smart Cards

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in his Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50486]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Water Coolants

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list the building projects under construction; and what coolant will be used for the building services water chilling system for such projects. [52053]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Missions

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the operations that have been undertaken under each of the defence missions outlined by the Strategic Defence Review in each year since 1998; and if he will make a statement. [51495]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Jobs (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of *(a)* Civil Service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of his Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56310]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Law Enforcement

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities designated with legislation there are within the responsibility of his Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57104]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Anglo-Italian Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last six months *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have met their Italian counterparts; and what subjects were discussed. [56887]

Dr. Moonie: *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57366]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was spent by the relevant pension fund on paying pensions to retired members of the armed forces in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [66562]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gorden Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many applications for war disablement pensions were made by *(a)* members of the Mercantile Marine and *(b)* other eligible branches of the armed forces in respect of skin cancer and other associated conditions have been (i) upheld and (ii) rejected by tribunals in each of the past 20 years, for which figures are available. [79491]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many claims for work-related illness were settled by his Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation; [56081]

(2) how many employees of his Department retired through work-related ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department; [56082]

(3) how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in his Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56083]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Redundant Nuclear Warheads

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what opportunities exist for United Kingdom defence companies and research bodies to assist Russia in *(a)* the dismantling of its redundant nuclear warheads and *(b)* immobilization of surplus plutonium from dismantled warheads, arising from the new nuclear weapons reduction agreement between Russia and the United States; [57989]

(2) what opportunities exist for British technology and defence companies to assist the United States in the immobilization of surplus plutonium from dismantled redundant nuclear warheads arising from the new nuclear weapons reduction agreement between Russia and the United States. [57988]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Luton, South

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what monies have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58587]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Tax Refunds

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why calculations of tax refunds being made to individuals identified as having been taxed incorrectly on retired pay awarded since 1952 does not take into account negative Treasury interest rates applied throughout the 1970s; and if he will make a statement. [59288]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason calculations of tax refunds being made to individuals identified as having been taxed incorrectly on retired pay awarded since 1952 have been based on simple interest; and if he will make a statement. [59289]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Written Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of ordinary written Questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58986]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61070]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced; [60890]

(2) what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61630]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, which organisations which were in receipt of a grant from him in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is; which organisations which were not in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is. [61396]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Ministers and officials had

meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62211]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Official Photographers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, on how many occasions during the last 12 months an official photographer has accompanied *(a)* him and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department on official visits (i) overseas and (ii) within the UK; what *(A)* travel expenses, *(B)* costs of equipment and processing, *(C)* staff payment and *(D)* other costs were incurred; what publications official photographs have appeared in during the last 12 months and what terms and conditions were attached to the publication of such photographs; and whether photographs taken on official visits are available for use in non-governmental literature. [62831]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last 12 months the requirement to engage in a competitive tendering process has been waived by his Department due to national security obligations under paragraph 6(h) of the supply regulations. [62815]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by his Department since 1st January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64612]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Energy Costs

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated *(a)* level and *(b)* cost of energy use in his Department and associated agencies was in each year since 1997; what proportion of energy was generated from renewable sources; and if he will make a statement. [65950]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Public Inquiries (Phone Lines)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on using 0870 telephone numbers for inquiries by the public to the Department and its agencies. [66199]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of buildings insurance to his Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66923]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what proportion of the public service agreements of his Department set out in the document Public Services for the Future 1998 have been met; and if he will make a statement. [68711]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Empty Properties

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the empty residential properties in each London borough in the ownership of his Department and its agencies, giving *(a)* the type of accommodation, *(b)* how long each property has been vacant and *(c)* what the intended future use is of the property. [69494]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs will be created in Portsmouth by making it the home for new aircraft carriers; and if he will make a statement. [70758]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Sustainable Development

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the interdepartmental discussions on Criterion 8 of the Consolidated Criteria relating to sustainable development. [71539]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Education and Training

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the annual cost of education and training in each service in each year since 1997. [71662]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Employment Costs

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the employment costs, including benefits, of *(a)* all ministers representing his Department and *(b)* special advisers and their support staff retained by his Department. [80159]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Anglo-French Discussions

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what recent discussions ministers and officials have had with the French Government about French participation in the United Kingdom aircraft carrier programme; [76568]

(2) whether the possibility of France joining in the United Kingdom aircraft carrier programme will be a factor to be taken into account in the decision to award the contract to Thales or BAe Systems. [76567]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

SA80 Rifles

Mr. Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if SA80 rifles have been withdrawn from his Department's stocks for export. [77371]

Mr. Ingram: No. However, we are currently considering options for dealing with the expected excess of SA80 A1 weapons that do not require upgrading to the A2 version.

HMS Albion

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what technical difficulties have been encountered in the construction of HMS Albion; and if he will make a statement. [78660]

Dr. Moonie: HMS Albion is the first of a new class of Landing Platform Dock vessels. She is being constructed by BAE Systems Marine Ltd at their Barrow in Furness shipyard. Technical difficulties encountered during her construction have been largely due to the use of a computer aided design tool that was new to the shipyard, immature design information being released for production, the use of modern build techniques and some novel warship design features such as the diesel/electric propulsion system. It is not unusual for technical issues to arise during the design and construction of the first of such a complex warship class and BAE Systems are working hard to overcome each of the issues. A revised programme for Albion has been agreed with BAE Systems Marine and she is expected to enter service in July 2003. The company is making stringent efforts to recover up to seven weeks of that slippage.

Bullying

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Army indicated when last questioned that they believe that *(a)* harassment, *(b)* discrimination and *(c)* bullying are problems in (i) their immediate area of work and (ii) the Army as a whole; what percentage of those responding this represents; what percentage of actual strength this represents; and if he will make a statement. [78634]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Medical Specialists

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many medical specialists, and in which specialisations, there are in the Reserves; [78319]

(2) what plans he has to *(a)* call up and *(b)* put on notice members of the defence medical services reserve forces; whether this will include former TA field hospitals; which specialities are being put on notice for call up in order to supplement regular defence medical services field hospitals and other facilities; and if he will make a statement. [78638]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Military Equipment (Gifts)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what items of military equipment have been given as a gift to another state, and when, since June 1997; and what the estimated value of the gift was in each case. [78650]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Eurofighter

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many orders have been received for the Eurofighter (Typhoon). [79272]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mercantile Marine

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many applications for war disablement pensions were made by members of the Mercantile Marine, in each of the last 20 years for which figures are available; and how many of these were *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected; [79462]

(2) how many applications were made for war disablement pensions by members of the eligible branches of the armed forces, other than members of the Mercantile Marine, in each of the past 20 years for which figures are available; and of these, how many were *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected. [79492]

Dr. Moonie: The tables set out the figures available relating to applications for war disablement pension, from members of the Mercantile Marine and eligible members of the Armed Forces. A separate figure for rejected claims is not available. Information on applications before 1996 is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mercantile Marine

	2001–2002	*2000–2001*	*1999–2000*	*1998–1999*	*1997–1998*	*1996–1997*
Received	83	98	97	97	187	265
Cleared[1]	78	113	115	138	225	403
Awarded	37	42	43	32	34	185
Rejected or withdrawn	41	71	72	106	191	218

Armed Forces

	2001–2002	*2000–2001*	*1999–2000*	*1989–1999*	*1997–1998*	*1996–1997*
Received	9,620	10,799	11,599	13,807	16,778	26,842
Cleared[1]	11,106	10,809	13,128	13,286	22,352	34,385
Awarded	9,696	9,335	11,187	11,231	18,729	29,315
Rejected or withdrawn	1,410	1,474	1,941	2,055	3,623	5,070

Note:
[1] May include claims uncleared from the previous year.

Mr. Gorden Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many applications for war disablement pensions were made by *(a)* members of the Mercantile Marine and *(b)* other eligible branches of the armed forces in respect of skin cancer and other associated conditions have been (i) upheld and (ii) rejected by tribunals in each of the past 20 years, for which figures are available. [79491]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Unexploded Ordnance

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what changes there have been to the British Army's practice in clearing unexploded ordnance in foreign training grounds used by our forces since his Department's payment of compensation to the victims of British munitions in Kenya; [80291]

(2) whether his Department has adopted guidelines to ensure that all unexploded munitions are cleared from foreign military training grounds used by British forces. [80289]

Mr. Ingram: The British Army employs the same robust procedures for clearing unexploded ordnance overseas as it does in the United Kingdom. In Kenya there has been an increase in Explosive Ordnance Clearance (EOC) in the last two years, in order to minimise the risk to local civilians. This work includes the location and destruction of unexploded munitions irrespective of which nation's armed forces have fired them. No change in practice have been made subsequent to compensation payments.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to contract clearance of unexploded ordnance at foreign military training sites used by British forces to specialist firms with appropriate expertise. [80290]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently no plans for the Ministry of Defence to contract out ordnance clearance on foreign military training sites.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Kenyan nationals are locally employed in assisting the British Army to clear unexploded ordnance at the Archer's Post training ground in Kenya; and how much of the training ground has been cleared. [80219]

Mr. Ingram: The British Army employs two Locally Employed Civilians (LECs) as Range Officers on behalf of the Kenyan Department of Defence (DoD). These LECs do not participate in the destruction of munitions, as this is the responsibility of Army personnel. The British Army conducts clearance operations on all areas of ranges that it uses for live firing.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision the British Army has made to educate Kenyan civilians who live and work near the military training ground at Archer's Post about associated dangers. [80292]

Mr. Ingram: Each year, the British Army conducts an education programme for the local civilians regarding the hazards of unexploded munitions. This informs people in the Archer's Post area, including the nomadic farmers, of the different types of Kenyan and other munitions that they might find in the area.

John Bredenkamp

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contacts his Department's officials have had in the last three years with *(a)* John Bredenkamp and *(b)* companies controlled by or associated with John Bredenkamp. [80331]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has extensive contact with industry and individuals. It would therefore entail disproportionate costs to establish what contacts the Department's officials have had with particular individuals or companies in the last three

years. The Government is aware of the allegations made against the named individual in the UN Panel Report, and the appropriate authorities are looking into them.

State Opening of Parliament

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel took part in the ceremony for the State Opening of Parliament in 2001; and how many he estimates will take part in 2002. [79842]

Mr. Ingram: The number of Armed Forces personnel who took part in the ceremony for the State Opening of Parliament in 2001 was 1,121. Five hundred and twenty personnel will participate in 2002. This reduction is the result of preparatory deployments against the contingency of industrial action by the Fire Brigade Union.

Servicemen (Absenteeism)

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many servicemen are absent without leave from their units; and what the figure was on 1 October 2001. [76667]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 24 October 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what public consultations have been commenced by his Department in each month since 10 October; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80265]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Eurofighter Typhoon

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Eurofighter Typhoons will be ordered by the armed forces; and when the armed forces will take delivery of the Eurofighter Typhoon. [78632]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 878W to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). There has been no change in the Government's commitment to the Eurofighter Typhoon. The Royal Air Force expects to take delivery of its total fleet of aircraft during the next 12 years.

Parliamentary Questions

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will answer the question of 22 July from the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford. [79868]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is still being collated. Once this is available, I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what public consultations have been commenced by his Department in each month since 10 October; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80265]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Royal Ordnance (Bishopton)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the NAO report on the Royal Ordnance factory at Bishopton will be published. [46425]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

GP Lists

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average general practitioner list in Worthing West. [74766]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

NHS Staff (Confidentiality)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish his Department's new code of practice on confidentiality and consent for people working in the National Health Service. [73753]

Mr. Hutton: "Confidentiality: A Code of Practice for NHS Staff" is expected to be published in spring 2003 following a public consultation exercise running from 22 October 2002 to 31 January 2003.

Obesity

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received in the past 12 months about obesity matters from *(a)* hon. and right hon. Members, *(b)* organisations and *(c)* members of the public. [74463]

Ms Blears: Over the past year the Department has received 31 Parliamentary Questions, 34 letters from hon. and right hon. Members, and 15 letters from organisations and the general public directly concerning obesity matters.

NHS Lists

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average NHS patient list size for *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* dental practitioners, broken down by each primary care trust in England. [74257]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department is doing to improve its performance in providing replies to *(a)* letters and *(b)* questions from hon. Members. [74867]

Ms Blears: Following the events and review of procedures described in the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the

Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 25 March 2002 *Official Report*, column 751W, we have made many improvements to our parliamentary unit, including additional staff, better accommodation, setting up a new electronic tracking system, and enhanced monitoring and oversight of work flows and working practices. We envisage that these measures will lead to faster response times in the Department's handling of Members' questions.

Change programmes are being established in all Government Departments, designed to build capacity for high performance. The expectation is that departments will achieve a step change in performance in line with the four principles set out in *Reforming Our Public Services: Principles into Practice*, published in March 2002.

In terms of correspondence, a customer service project has been set up under the Department's change programme with the following objectives:

To improve significantly the Department's performance in handling telephone, written and e-mail enquiries from members of the public and their representatives; and,

To maximise the potential of the Department's website and other forms of communication media as a source of information to the public.

This project will give further impetus to improving performance in the timeliness and quality of responses to correspondence.

PSA Testing

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what processes are in place to inform men that they can ask their general practitioner about the PSA test and the issues that surround it. [75745]

Ms Blears: Evidence-based primary care resource packs were sent to all general practitioners (GPs) in England in September 2002, meeting a National Health Service Cancer Plan commitment to ensure that all men considering a prostate specific antigen (PSA) test are given information concerning the benefits, limitations and risks associated with receiving a test.

The packs are primarily aimed at GPs and practice nurses to use in counselling men with no symptoms who are worried about prostate cancer. A leaflet is available for men to take home to read in their own time, to enable them to make an informed choice on whether or not to have a PSA test. If they do decide to go ahead with the test, they can have it free on the NHS.

Nuclear Installations

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received concerning the health implications of working and living in the vicinity of a nuclear power station. [75793]

Ms Blears: Since the mid 1980s the Department has received many representations about the possible health effects of nuclear installations in the United Kingdom.

The committee on medical aspects of radiation in the environment (COMARE) was established in November 1985 in response to the final recommendation of the report of the independent advisory group chaired by Sir Douglas Black. Its remit is to look at the possible health effects of all source of radiation whether natural or man made, including radioactive materials discharged from nuclear installations. The committee's terms of reference are "to assess and advise Government and the Devolved Administrations on the health effects of natural and man-made radiation in the environment and to assess the adequacy of the available data and the need for further research". COMARE has now published seven reports and has also published several statements into allegations of health effects around nuclear installations. The committee has also made many recommendations for further investigations and examines these studies as they become available. Details of the committee's reports can be found on its web site at www.open.gov.uk/doh/comare.htm.

Cancer Care

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that every cancer patient within the NHS receives treatment from surgeons and physicians who are specialists in their field; and by when he expects this target to be met. [75774]

Ms Blears: All doctors must work within the limits of their professional competence, as required by General Medical Council (GMC) guidance, *Good Medical Practice*. Doctors should not therefore be given or take on responsibility for patients if they are not competent to do so. This is to ensure that patients receive the highest quality of care and have the best chances of making a full recovery.

The National Health Service in England employs doctors in training grades who are not yet qualified to work independently and staff grade doctors, some of whom are trained specialists. NHS Consultants supervise the work of all of these doctors and are responsible for the care patients receive. Consultants are all trained specialists included on the Specialist Register held by the GMC.

The Department and more recently the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), has produced *Improving Outcomes Guidance* (IOG) on how services should be organised for specific types of cancer. The guidance includes recommendations on areas including the establishment of specialist multidisciplinary teams. Targets for the implementation of IOG form part of the priorities and planning framework.

The NHS Cancer Plan set out a target of providing nearly 1,000 extra cancer specialists by 2006. The NHS is on track to meet this target with an extra 500 cancer consultants between 1999 and 2002.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received concerning delays in obtaining NICE guidance on cancer treatments. [75799]

Ms Blears: The Department has received numerous letters and other representations regarding delays in obtaining guidance from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) on cancer treatments.

The appraisal process, from referral to completion, has been designed to allow the full participation of patients, clinicians, companies and stakeholders. NICE is fully aware of the need to ensure that the process is as streamlined as possible, without losing any of the important safeguards it contains, in order to publish guidance soon after the treatments are launched.

It is not acceptable for funding authorities to refuse to fund a newly licensed treatment just because it is awaiting appraisal by NICE. Decisions on funding should be based on local consideration of the available evidence when NICE appraisals are awaited.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of non-listed cancer patients require *(a)* diagnostic X-ray examinations, *(b)* ultrasound investigations for gynaecological and obstetric problems, *(c)* mammograms for breast cancer and *(d)* CT scans; and what plans he has to introduce these patients to the national cancer waiting lists published by his Department. [75766]

Ms Blears: Data are not collected centrally on diagnostic tests for cancer patients. The National Health Service Cancer Plan set out waiting time targets for cancer. These targets aim to reduce the amount of time patients have to wait from urgent referral to beginning treatment, which will include the diagnostic phase, and from diagnosis of cancer to first treatment. We have no plans to include waiting times for individual diagnostic tests in cancer waiting times monitoring.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to ensure uniform reporting standards in cancer care; and if he will make a statement on cancer care data reporting standards. [78929]

Ms Blears: Centrally collected information on cancer services is limited to the collection of data to monitor the waiting times targets in the NHS Cancer Plan and the collection of data on coverage for the National Health Service screening services.

All of the definitions relating to these processes are nationally standardised and are made available in advance to enable local organisations to ensure that all data are formatted to the required standard.

The Manual of Cancer Service Standards, published 2 January 2001, provides a framework to enable local cancer networks to assess the quality of services they provide.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms he has in place to ensure the efficacy of cancer care data gathering measures. [78927]

Ms Blears: Data on the diagnosis and treatment of patients with cancer are gathered locally, in accordance with data definitions which have been widely consulted on and agreed. The data definitions are published on the NHS Information Authority website, in dataset change notices (DSCNs). The National Health Service is responsible for ensuring the efficacy of the data.

NHS Trust Land

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each NHS trust, the value of land and buildings disposed of in the last three years; what targets he has set for the next three years; and what proposals he has to amend the guidance on disposals so that more affordable housing can be provided for low paid employees in the NHS. [76389]

Ms Blears: A list of National Health Service trust disposals by value during the last three years has been placed in the Library.

The Department does not set targets for NHS trust disposals of land and buildings. Guidance on the disposals of surplus NHS property is contained in *Estatecode* which is continually kept under review.

All NHS trusts have to prepare an estates strategy. As part of that strategy the need for residential accommodation for NHS staff has to be assessed before any assets are declared surplus. However, in some instances it may be more appropriate for the land or asset to be developed in a wider context of sustainable communities of which a component could be housing for NHS staff.

The Department is keen to ensure that an adequate provision of affordable housing for NHS employees is available. Since publication of the NHS Plan agreements have been reached and/or accommodation made available for over 2,000 additional residential units in London. Fifty per cent, of the £250 million starter homes initiative has been allocated to nurses and health care workers.

Health Professions Council

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to allow more representatives from the professional advisory committees onto the Health Professionals Council; and if he will make a statement. [76795]

Mr. Hutton: The membership of the Health Professions Council is set out by statute in the Health Professions Order 2002 and the Government has no plans to change that. The Health Professions Council has power to establish professional advisory committees to obtain advice on professional matters for the council and its statutory committees. The size, format and composition of any such committees are a matter for the Health Professions Council to determine.

Out-Patient Consultations

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many out-patient consultations with private patients were held in NHS hospitals in each NHS region in each of the last six years. [76608]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested will be placed in the Library.

Seroxat

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what investigation he has made into the *(a)* side effects associated with and *(b)* general safety of Seroxat; [76966]

(2) what representations he has received regarding the safety of the antidepressant drug Seroxat; and if he will make a statement. [76965]

Ms Blears: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) has received a range of representations including parliamentary questions, letters from hon. and right hon. Members, patients and health care professionals about the safety of Seroxat.

Seroxat (paroxetine) is a member of a group of drugs known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Before a product is granted a licence for use in the UK it must meet appropriate standards of safety, quality and efficacy. After licensing the safety of all medicines including SSRIs is continually monitored by the MCA and the independent expert advisory body, the committee on safety of medicines (CSM) and any new evidence which emerges is carefully reviewed.

The MCA/CSM carried out a major review of all side effects associated with SSRIs, which was completed in 2000 and resulted in product information for all SSRIs including Seroxat being updated and harmonised to reflect the common safety profiles of these medicines. An article in "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in 2000 informed prescribers about this review and reminded them about the risk of withdrawal reactions.

Withdrawal reactions are an important and well-recognised side effect of Seroxat and also occur with the other SSRIs. The MCA/CSM warned prescribers about the possibility of withdrawal reactions associated with Seroxat via an article in the bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in 1993. The CSM re-reviewed the issue of withdrawal reactions and possible dependence with Seroxat and the other SSRIs in 1998–99. From detailed review of all available data, the CSM concluded that all SSRIs may be associated with withdrawal reactions on stopping but on current evidence they are not associated with dependence. As a result of this review product information for all SSRIs was updated in relation to withdrawal reactions. This issue was also reviewed at a European level by the committee on proprietary medicinal products which reached similar conclusions.

The product information for Seroxat which includes the summary of product characteristics for prescribers and the patient information leaflet, contains full details of side effects and warnings about withdrawal reactions. Doctors are advised to consider gradual tapering of dose when Seroxat is discontinued rather than abruptly stopping to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Teenage Pregnancy Strategy

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions have been performed on girls *(a)* under the age of 16 and *(b)* under the age of 18 since commencement of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy; and what these figures are, expressed as a percentage of (i) those girls to whom contraception, including emergency contraception, has been provided through the strategy and (ii) the total number of girls in each age range. [78065]

Ms Blears: The Government's teenage pregnancy strategy was launched in June 1999.

The following table provides abortion numbers and rates for resident women of England and Wales, aged under 16 and 16–19, for the years 1999, 2000 and 2001. Rates for under 16s are based on the population of women aged 13–15. The information requested is not available for under 18s.

	Under 16s Number	*Under 16s Rate*	*16–19 Number*	*16–19 Rate*
1999	3600	3.8	32800	26.0
2000	3700	3.8	33200	26.7
2001	3600	3.7	33400	26.1

Source:
Health Statistics Quarterly, No. 15

Information on abortion data as a percentage of those girls to whom contraception, including emergency contraception, has been provided through the strategy, is not available as requested.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many sexually transmitted infections have been recorded in girls *(a)* under the age of 16 and *(b)* under the age of 18 since commencement of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy; and what these figures are, expressed as a percentage of (i) those girls to whom contraception including emergency contraception, has been provided through the strategy and (ii) the total number of girls in each age range. [78066]

Ms Blears: The Government's teenage pregnancy strategy was launched in June 1999. The table shows numbers of females diagnosed with the following sexually transmitted infections: infectious syphilis, uncomplicated gonorrhoea, uncomplicated chlamydial infection, first attack genital herpes simplex virus and first attack genital warts, for the years 1999, 2000 and 2001. Rates per 100,000 13–15 year olds and 16–19 year olds in the population are in brackets. Data for the under 18 age band is not collected.

Condition	*(All)*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Region	England			
Sex	Female			
Age group	Under 16	1404 (156)	1510 (164)	1765 (192)
	16–19	21612 (1822)	23712 (2023)	25345 (2163)

Source:
A joint publication between PHLS (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), DHSS and PS (Northern Ireland) and the Scottish ISD (D) 5 Collaborative Group (ISD, SCIEH and MSSVD). 2002.

Information on sexually transmitted infections data as a percentage of those young women to whom contraception, including emergency contraception has been provided through the strategy, is not available as requested.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which *(a)* pharmacies and *(b)* supermarkets in England and Wales are authorised to provide emergency contraception, including the so-called morning after pill, to teenagers under the age of 16 years; since when each business has been authorised to do so; and on what terms the provision of emergency contraception is authorised. [78070]

Ms Blears: Information on independent, chain or supermarket pharmacies providing emergency contraception is not collected centrally. The involvement of pharmacies in the National Health

Service provision of emergency contraception is a local decision taken by the primary care trusts in liaison with local pharmacies.

Pharmacists providing emergency contraception under NHS arrangements do so under patient group directions (PGD). A PGD is a written instruction for the supply or administration of medicines to groups of patients without an individualised doctor's prescription. The supply of medicines under PGDs remains under medical supervision.

PGDs are drawn up locally under regulations and guidance issued in August 2000. They apply to pharmacists, nurses and other designated health professionals and are authorised by the clinical governance lead in the primary care trust or community NHS trust.

Pharmacists providing emergency contraception to under 16s do so under the established legal framework for all health professionals. This involves assessing the young person's competence to understand the choices they are making and encouraging them to talk to their parents. Pharmacists are trained to ensure that young women are informed about and encouraged to visit local services that provide regular forms of contraception and condoms to protect against sexually transmitted infections.

All health professionals, including pharmacists, are bound by their professional code of confidentiality. A young person's request for confidentiality is respected unless there are serious child protection issues.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many conceptions have been recorded in girls *(a)* under the age of 16 and *(b)* under the age of 18 since the commencement of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy; and what these figures are expressed as (i) a percentage of those girls to whom contraception, including emergency contraception, has been provided through the strategy and (ii) a percentage of the total number of girls in each age range. [78005]

Ms Blears: The Government's teenage pregnancy strategy was launched in June 1999.

The table shows conception numbers and rates by age of woman at conception for residents of England for 1999 and 2000. Rates for under 16s and under 18s are based on the population of women aged 13–15 and 15–17 respectively. The data for 2000 remains provisional.

	1999 Number	*1999 Rate*	*2000 Number*	*2000 Rate*
Under 16	7408	8.2	7617	8.3
Under 18	39,247	44.7	38,690	43.6

Source:
Office for National Statistics

Information on conception data as a percentage of those girls to whom contraception, including emergency contraception, has been provided through the strategy, is not available as requested.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which schools in England and Wales are authorised to provide *(a)* contraception and *(b)* emergency contraception to their pupils; since when each school has been authorised to do so; and in which schools and on what terms (i) contraception and (ii) emergency contraception is available to girls and boys under the age of 16 in these schools. [78067]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of schools providing contraception as part of a school based health service is not collected centrally.

The provision of school based health services is a decision for the governing body of the individual school, where the governing body and school community identify a need. Services should be developed in consultation with parents and information clearly provided as part of the school's sex and relationship education policy.

Within a school based service, contraception, including emergency contraception, is only provided to young people under 16 by health professionals under medical supervision. This includes the supply by school nurses, working to patient group directions. A patient group direction is a written instruction for the supply or administration of medicines to groups of patients without an individualised doctor's prescription. There are no circumstances where teachers provide contraception.

Health professionals can provide contraception to young people under 16 provided they are satisfied that the young person is competent to understand fully the implications of any treatment and to make a choice of the treatment involved. Health professionals work within an established legal framework which involves assessing the young person's competence to understand the choices they are making and encouraging them to talk to their parents. All professionals are bound by their professional code of confidentiality. A young person's request for confidentiality is respected unless there are serious child protection issues.

School based health services provide advice on a wide range of health and emotional issues. The benefits of providing pupils with easy access to one to one advice from a health professional are recognised in a recent OFSTED report "Sex and Relationships" (2002), which cites a school based clinic as an example of best practice.

Hospital Chaplain

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 795W, what access to information on a patient's religious affiliation a hospital chaplain will have in the event of needing to administer the last rites to an unconscious persion in extremis. [78301]

Ms Blears: Where a patient is incapable of providing consent, perhaps through serious or terminal illness, it is possible for hospital staff to disclose their religious affiliation to a hospital chaplain, as this may in the circumstances be in the best interests of the patient concerned.

Ghana

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings Ministers have had with representatives of the Ghanaian Government in 2002. [77994]

Ms Blears: There have been no meetings between Ministers and representatives of the Ghanaian Government in 2002.

NHS Direct

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if nurses operating on NHS Direct are able to give only pre-set answers to queries. [77604]

Ms Blears: NHS Direct nurse advisors use their experience and expertise alongside a computerised decision support system (algorithms), as part of the National Health Service clinical assessment system (CAS) to enable them to identify the nature of the call and assess the needs of the caller.

NHS Direct defines what it requires of its nurses through a set of competency statements. Nurses can be recruited from any specialty provided they meet these competencies, although they must have between three to five years post-qualification experience.

There is a need to maintain a balance between using CAS to support the clinical decision whilst allowing scope for professional judgement by the nurse.

Jams Regulations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the organisations being consulted by the Food Standards Agency about the revision of the Jams Regulations. [77821]

Ms Blears: On 1 August this year, the Food Standards Agency wrote to approximately one hundred interested parties to seek preliminary views on the drafting of new Jams and Similar Products Regulations. This letter was also placed on the Agency's website. A copy of the letter, together with a list of recipients, has been placed in the Library.

The draft Regulations will be the subject of a further full public consultation in the new year.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the Government did not secure reserved descriptions in the EC Jams Directive (2001/113/EC) for *(a)* curd, *(b)* flavour curd, *(c)* lemon cheese and *(d)* mincemeat. [77822]

Ms Blears: The purpose of the EC Jams Directive is to harmonise Community provisions relating to Jams and similar products.

Since fruit curd and mincemeat products are not produced in any significant quantities in other Member States, it is more appropriate for the composition of these products to be controlled in national, rather than European Union, legislation.

Poultry Meat

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the incidence and the levels of nitrofurans detected in poultry meat imported from Brazil. [77823]

Ms Blears: Between 1 January 2002 and 14 October 2002, the United Kingdom is aware that 19 rapid alerts, sent via the EU's rapid alert system for food and feed, have been issued regarding the detection of nitrofurans in 28 samples of Brazilian poultry meat. The average level of nitrofuran metabolites in the samples was 26µg/kg. Five samples exceeded 50µg/kg with the highest level being 120µg/kg for the nitrofuran metabolite AMOZ. Residues of nitrofurans should not be present at any level in food. No conclusion can be drawn regarding the frequency of contamination, as there is no data on how many samples of Brazilian poultry meat have been the subject of testing.

PET Scanners

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many PET scanners there are in England and at which hospitals; [77945]

(2) What the cost is of a PET scanner to the National Health Service. [77946]

Ms Blears: There are five positron emission tomography (PET) scanners in National Health Service hospitals in England used for routine clinical assessments. They are situated at Guys, St. Thomas', Middlesex, Mount Vernon and Hammersmith Hospitals. An additional private scanner is situated in Harley Street. Four other PET scanners are used primarily for research and are located in dedicated research facilities in London, Cambridge and Manchester.

The initial capital outlay for a fully equipped PET Scanner and associated facilities is approximately £4.2 million, with annual running costs of approximately £1.02 million.

Hospital Visits

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers visited since June 2001. [77964]

Ms Blears: Since 1 June 2001, Ministers in this Department have visited 117 hospitals. Fifteen of these visits were made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of taking HRT long term on *(a)* the incidence of (i) breast cancer and (ii) osteoporosis and *(b)* the quality of life of women. [78570]

Ms Blears: The Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) and its Expert Working Group on Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) have reviewed the long-term safety of HRT as new information has become available. In 2001, the United Kingdom was actively involved in a European-wide review of all available evidence relating to HRT use in order to provide consistent core product information throughout Europe. Following the publication of further studies relating to the long-term effects of HRT earlier this year, the CSM re-convened its Expert Working Group (EWG) on HRT to examine in detail all the latest evidence. In light of the findings of its EWG, CSM has made further recommendations for product information to ensure that the advice for women and doctors accurately reflects current knowledge.

A very small increase in the risk of developing breast cancer in women on long-term HRT was first recognised in 1997. Women and health professionals were warned of this risk through an article in the drug safety bulletin "*Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance*" and product information was updated. Among women aged 50 who do not use HRT, approximately 45 in every 1000 will develop breast cancer by the age of 70. Recently published studies have confirmed that this number will increase to about 47 per 1000 women who take HRT for 5 years, about 51 per 1000 women who take HRT for 10 years, and about 57 per 1000 women who take HRT for 15 years.

In the UK, HRT products are indicated for the treatment of menopausal symptoms, and some products are also licensed for the prevention of osteoporosis. Data relating to the effectiveness of HRT in preventing bone fractures were reviewed by CSM at the time of licensing and were judged to support "the prevention of osteoporosis" as an indication for HRT. Further evidence was provided in studies published earlier this year for a significant reduction in the number of hip fractures with long-term HRT use.

A recent trial in women with pre-existing heart disease examined cardiovascular effects of long-term HRT and also considered "quality of life" indicators. Although the findings of this trial were mixed, the women suffering from post-menopausal symptoms experienced an overall improvement in "quality of life". Based on all currently available evidence, the benefits of short-term use of HRT for the relief of menopausal symptoms are judged to outweigh the risks. The decision to use HRT should be discussed by a woman with her doctor on an individual basis and the risks and benefits regularly reappraised with continued HRT use.

Prescription Dispensary Systems

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on developing a national specification for automated prescription dispensary systems. [78958]

Ms Blears: Automated dispensing systems are seen as part of the Integrated Care Record Service (ICRS). The ICRS implementation will run up to 2008 by which time a unified patient record system will exist for all National Health Service patients. This will include the functionality of electronic prescribing, pharmacy systems and, where appropriate, robotic dispensing systems. Funding for this programme over the next three years will be announced in the autumn.

In this context the Department is considering the recommendation from the Audit Commission that a national specification for automated dispensary systems should be commissioned and that earmarked funds should also be considered for the introduction of these systems.

Reporting Rates

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the reporting rates are to the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre by *(a)* public health laboratories and *(b)* NHS microbiology laboratories. [78788]

Ms Blears: Information on reporting rates from Public Health Laboratory Service and National Health Service laboratories is not available. However, information available from the communicable disease surveillance centre shows that a total of 157,499 reports were received from NHS laboratories in 2001 and 180,503 reports from PHLS laboratories. It is estimated that the PHLS carries out over 40 per cent. of the NHS microbiology testing requirements.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the preparedness of systems to replace the Public Health Laboratory Service. [78783]

Ms Blears: In the Chief Medical Officer's strategy for combating infectious diseases, *Getting ahead of the Curve*, he proposed subsuming the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS), the centre for applied microbiology and research, the national radiological protection board and the national focus for chemical incidents into a single new body, the Health Protection Agency (HPA).

The specialist and reference functions of the PHLS, mostly the Central Public Health Laboratory, and the communicable disease surveillance centre are to enter the HPA in their entirety, retaining their existing systems.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what assessment he has made of the impact on the existing effectiveness of the National Network of Microbiology Laboratories of the proposed changes to the Public Health Laboratory Service. [78785]

Ms Blears: We are aware of the informal microbiology networking arrangements currently managed by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS). We intend to strengthen and enhance the current PHLS arrangements in the process of transferring the routine microbiology laboratories to National Health Service trusts and to build on their example of good practice.

The Chief Executive of the NHS has written to the chief executives of the receiving NHS trusts emphasising the need for the transfer process to be as smooth and efficient as possible. Maintenance and enhancement of the he existing functional arrangements between laboratories currently in the PHLS is clearly an important part of the efficiency of the transfer process.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when new replacement managed pathology networks are proposed to be established and effective to replace the Public Health Laboratory Service. [78784]

Ms Blears: As outlined in the recently published document, *Future arrangements for microbiology laboratory services*, all Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) laboratories, except for those designated as Health Protection Agency (HPA) laboratories, will transfer into the management of National Health Service trusts on 1 April 2003.

The Department of Health document, *Pathology—The Essential Service, Draft guidance on modernising pathology services*, supported the development of managed pathology networks as an effective means of delivering improved pathology services.

The consultation period for this document ended on 30 September 2002. The results of the consultation are currently being considered. It is anticipated that new guidance will be released to the NHS in the new year.

Phsyical Activity Pilot Projects

Patsy Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish further details of the physical activity pilot projects announced in May; and when the £2.5m funding for the projects is to be made available. [79184]

Ms Blears: Primary care trusts based in neighbourhood renewal fund areas were invited to submit expressions of interest by their regional directors of Public Health last month. These are currently being sifted by regional panels. The short-listed applicants will be asked to submit full applications by 20 December 2002. Awards will be announced in Spring 2003.

Alcohol Abuse

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reduce the waiting time for treatment for alcohol abuse; and if he will make a statement. [79375]

Ms Blears: Data on waiting times for alcohol treatment are not collected centrally as a matter of routine.

The Cabinet Office Strategy Unit and the Department of Health are currently conducting a joint consultation exercise on the national alcohol harm reduction strategy. The consultation exercise will run until 15 January 2003 and the strategy itself is due to be published in Summer 2003. The consultation exercise will seek the views of a wide range of stakeholders on a broad spectrum of alcohol misuse issues, including alcohol treatment. Copies are available in the Library or at: www.strategy.gov.uk/2002/alcohol/consultationdoc.shtml or, www.doh.gov.uk/alcohol/alcoholstrategy.htm

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths from alcohol abuse of *(a)* women and *(b)* men there were in each year from 1997 to 2001. [79376]

Ms Blears: Information collected centrally about the cause of deaths does not systematically record whether a death is attributable to alcohol misuse. A number of health and lifestyle factors can contribute to diseases such as cancer, stroke and coronary heart disease, and it can be difficult to isolate alcohol consumption as the most important of these factors.

A research review commissioned by the Department in 1997 concluded that between 5,000 and 40,000 deaths are attributable to alcohol misuse each year in England and Wales.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the results of the separation of support for drug and alcohol reduction strategies; and if he will make a statement. [79374]

Ms Blears: In 1998 the United Kingdom Anti-Drug Co-ordination Unit (UKADCU) developed the national drug strategy. The focus of this strategy was illegal drugs, crime reduction and enforcement. Key planks of the strategy centred upon availability and supply issues that would clearly not have been applicable to legal substances. As alcohol is not illegal it was decided it would be inappropriate to include it in this strategy.

The Government are committed to implementing the national alcohol harm reduction strategy by 2004, and work on developing the strategy is currently being taken forward by the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, the Department of Health and other Government Departments. The strategy is due to be published in Summer 2003, and it will contain recommendations on the most effective ways of implementation across Government, including any links to be made with the implementation of the drugs strategy.

Hospices

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase funds to hospices *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Lancashire. [79577]

Ms Blears: The NHS Cancer Plan, published in September 2000, pledged that the National Health Service contribution to the costs of specialist palliative care (including hospices) would increase by £50 million by 2004.

Progress to date has been slow. We have therefore asked Professor Mike Richards, the National Cancer Director, to work with the NHS and the voluntary sector to develop proposals for a new approach to specialist palliative care funding that will ensure delivery of the £50 million increase and develop a mechanism to secure long term investment. Professor Richards has been asked to report to Ministers later this Autumn.

To support this initiative, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced on 2 October that we are making available an extra £10 million for specialist palliative care services in 2002–03. It will be for local health communities, with their voluntary sector partners, to decide how this funding should be deployed in support of the Cancer Plan objectives.

Funding for specialist palliative care services in Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of the devolved administrations, and whilst the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Emergency Care

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to implement the recommendations of the Reforming Emergency Care document in respect of addressing the recruitment and retention difficulties in accident and emergency departments. [79266]

Ms Blears: *Reforming Emergency Care* recommended breaking down over rigid demarcation barriers to enable more flexible ways of working throughout National Health Service emergency care provision. This included separating patients into "streams" according to need and enabling nurse practitioners to take a much greater role in dealing with patients. Central investment of £40 million has already enabled the recruitment of 600 additional accident and emergency (A&E) nurses to support the separation of services for patients with minor injuries or illness from those with more serious conditions.

The access care group workforce team has been set up to take forward the recommendations of *Reforming Emergency Care* on workforce planning and development to help ensure for the longer term we have the right number of staff, with the right skills, in the right place.

Infection Risk Assessment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to adopt similar proposals to those introduced in Scotland on the development of training packages for NHS staff groups on healthcare-associated infection risk assessment and management; and if he will make a statement. [79697]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service University (NHSU), the organisation set-up by the Department to establish a university for the National Health Service, is leading a pilot project to deliver training programmes in cleaning, at NVQ Level One, and infection control, leading to a college certificate. It is expected that at least 4,000 NHS staff will have benefited from this initiative by the end of the pilot project in May 2003. The project will be evaluated and if successful, these or similar programmes will form part of NHSU's ongoing portfolio of courses.

Our strategy to combat infectious disease, *Getting Ahead of the Curve*, aims to reassert control over serious infectious disease problems and identified healthcare associated infection (HCAI) as a priority area. A new targeted action plan to address HCAI is being developed and this will consider training. The plan should be ready around the end of the year.

Nursing Courses

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collates on how many applications for pre-registration nursing courses are rejected on the ground that the supply of places cannot keep up with demand; and if he will make a statement. [79712]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect or collate information on the number of applications to nursing programmes that are rejected. Applications for entry to nurse education are processed by the nursing and midwifery admissions service who operate a clearing system for those individuals who are not immediately placed with a university. The number of undergraduate pre-registration training places available each year are determined through work force planning processes led locally by work force development confederations.

Beef Assurance Scheme

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list abattoirs in the South West and South East of England which will slaughter animals over the age of 30 months but less than 42 months under the Government's Beef Assurance Scheme; and if he will make a statement on the Government's support of organic farming; [78919]

(2) what legislation prevents abattoirs from slaughtering cattle over the age of 30 months under the Beef Assurance Scheme. [78920]

Ms Blears *[holding answers 5 November 2002]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that licensed abattoirs are free to slaughter animals reared under the beef assurance scheme, but only a number choose to do so. There is no legislation to prevent abattoirs from slaughtering such cattle, but there are controls in place relating to the removal of vertebral column from animals over 30 months of age.

Organic farming is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Community Health Councils

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, when he expects community health councils to be abolished. [79892]

Ms Blears: Community Health Councils (CHCs) will be abolished once the new arrangements for patient and public involvement are functioning. There is no abolition date for CHCs as yet, but we will make an announcement as soon as a date is set.

Heart Operations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 October to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, column 400W, whether NHS patients will have a choice of all the listed hospitals for their heart operations. [79964]

Ms Blears: Each referring hospital has identified a number of core options which are most likely to meet the individual needs of local patients.

If a patient would prefer to go to a local hospital that is not included in these options for the treatment their patient care advisor will have up to date information on all the hospitals in this country or elsewhere in Europe that are suitable for the patient and should seek to arrange their treatment according to their wishes.

The choices will depend on the nature of the patient's illness. For some patients who are very ill or who have other illnesses as well, it may be that some of the options on offer do not have the facilities or expertise needed to treat them.

Abortion

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* NHS and *(b)* private clinics are licensed to perform abortions up to birth; and if he will list them. [79815]

Ms Blears: Abortions undertaken after 24 weeks gestation can only be performed in a National Health Service hospital.

Under Section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967, as amended, NHS hospitals do not need the Secretary of State for Health's approval to perform abortion, at any gestation. However, a pregnancy may only be terminated if two registered medical practitioners are of the opinion, formed in good faith that an abortion is justified within the terms of the Act, in the light of their clinical judgement of all the particular circumstances of the individual case.

Beyond 24 weeks gestation, an abortion can only be performed when:

the termination is necessary to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman; or

the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated; or

there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped; or

to save the life or to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman.

General Practitioners

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs were practising in England and Wales in each of the last five years, broken down by region. [75525]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 October 2002]:* The information requested for England is shown in the table. The information relating to Wales is a matter for the devolved Administration.

The numbers of general practitioners (GPs) and trainee GPs continue to grow, with GP registrar numbers at their highest ever level. In March 2002 there were 1,910 GP registrars. These are the GPs of the future.

All General Medical Practitioners (Excluding GP Retainers)[1] Of Which NHS Plan GPs[2] And Unrestricted Principle & Equivalents (UPEs)[3] In England As At 1 October 1997 to 1999 30 September 2000 to 2001 And 31 March 2002 By Strategic Health Authority[4]

DHSC	Strategic Health Authority	1997 All Practitioners Excl GP Retainers	1997 Of Which NHS Plan	1997 UPEs	1998 All Practitioners Excl GP Retainers	1998 Of Which NHS Plan	1998 UPEs	1999 All Practitioners Excl GP Retainers	1999 Of Which NHS Plan	1999 UPEs	2000 All Practitioners Excl GP Retainers	2000 Of Which NHS Plan	2000 UPEs	2001 All Practitioners Excl GP Retainers	2001 Of Which NHS Plan	2001 UPEs	March 2002 All Practitioners Excl GP Retainers	March 2002 Of Which NHS Plan	March 2002 UPEs
North	Cheshire & Merseyside	1,421	1,338	1,316	1,413	1,337	1,316	1,458	1,381	1,318	1,458	1,366	1,334	1,481	1,375	1,328	1,485	1,385	1330
	County Durham & Tees Valley	648	621	614	650	620	614	656	626	621	661	634	617	696	662	627	685	658	640
	Cumbria & Lancashire	1,134	1,066	1,070	1,147	1,109	1,081	1,158	1,106	1,083	1,152	1,105	1,079	1,174	1,118	1,087	1,194	1,120	1091
	Greater Manchester	1,485	1,424	1,393	1,484	1,433	1,397	1,510	1,452	1,407	1,523	1,480	1,408	1,518	1,441	1,391	1,520	1,443	1,400
	North & East Yorkshire & Northern Lincolnshire	999	944	921	991	944	925	1,011	950	926	1,021	948	932	1,039	970	941	1,082	902	953
	Northumberland Tyne & Wear	836	811	789	856	806	785	864	820	794	875	819	802	907	852	830	928	861	832
	South Yorkshire	758	718	716	758	723	715	772	731	721	778	733	723	794	739	725	788	740	723
	West Yorkshire	1,264	1,197	1,177	1,279	1,206	1,186	1,309	1,230	1,204	1,324	1,234	1,209	1,358	1,278	1,238	1,380	1,291	1257
Midlands & Eastern	Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire	915	883	870	944	902	883	948	903	886	955	903	887	985	907	888	985	904	888
	Birmingham & the Black Country	1,327	1,293	1,261	1,343	1,301	1,265	1,357	1,313	1,263	1,380	1,317	1,273	1,391	1,315	1,267	1,411	1,322	1255
	Coventry, Warwickshire Herefordshire & Worcestershire	907	859	832	901	867	840	906	873	844	924	870	847	941	894	857	971	891	861
	Essex	849	821	810	862	830	819	860	831	826	857	829	819	851	816	810	862	824	818
	Lancastershire, Northamptonshire & Rutland	908	843	826	902	843	830	896	829	811	877	823	806	894	833	821	895	827	817
	Norfolk, Suffolk & Cambridgeshire	1,316	1,263	1,226	1,335	1,276	1,238	1,348	1,283	1,244	1,371	1,293	1,265	1,388	1,302	1,259	1,397	1,323	1288
	Shropshire & Staffordshire	782	762	747	813	778	765	830	799	786	838	795	775	825	765	768	827	785	773
	Trent	1,430	1,370	1,353	1,459	1,392	1,376	1,471	1,413	1,393	1,507	1,438	1,409	1,543	1,445	1,412	1,513	1,441	1411
London	North Central London	788	744	671	802	750	687	786	747	880	819	789	694	804	751	682	809	755	864
	North East London	888	849	768	896	848	800	894	848	802	925	874	809	899	855	794	913	849	798
	North West London	1,209	1,164	970	1,188	1,128	969	1,134	1,091	972	1,125	1,081	958	1,150	1,093	976	1,121	1,070	967
	South East London	868	833	774	962	830	794	901	866	807	886	855	807	904	875	817	894	867	828
	South West London	779	734	666	767	717	681	781	725	686	793	728	685	788	727	681	812	744	683
South	Avon, Gloucestershire & Wiltshire	1,325	1,262	1,235	1,374	1,298	1,280	1,404	1,312	1,282	1,424	1,324	1,296	1,442	1,333	1,312	1,447	1,352	1322
	Hampshire & Isle of Wight	1,080	1,011	998	1,070	1,020	1,005	1,089	1,027	1,012	1,099	1,034	1,021	1,122	1,034	1,024	1,130	1,035	1024
	Kent & Medway	904	870	548	916	873	842	918	675	853	901	866	847	915	864	648	812	868	848
	Dorset & Somerset	794	748	731	820	762	747	843	774	757	845	786	767	867	792	771	869	794	770
	South West Peninsula	1,066	1,004	993	1,063	1,011	1,001	1,060	1,010	1,002	1,093	1,019	1,008	1,121	1,034	1,023	1,112	1,036	1028
	Surrey & Sussex	1,486	1,412	1,367	1,518	1,432	1,383	1,522	1,431	1,385	1,531	1,442	1,400	1,571	1,455	1,408	1,588	1,470	1414
	Thames Valley	1,232	1,182	1,159	1,264	1,215	1,186	1,301	1,243	1,218	1,308	1,247	1,227	1,335	1,267	1,246	1,382	1,285	1257
England Total		29,389	28,046	27,099	29,897	28,251	27,392	29,397	28,467	27,581	30,252	28,583	27,704	30,685	28,802	27,843	30,858	28,950	27,956

Notes

[1] All General Medical Practitioners (excluding GP Retainers) include GMS Unrestricted Principal. PMS Contracted GPs. Restricted Principles. Assistants. GP Registers. Salaried Doctors (para 52 SFA) and PMS Other

[2] NHS Plan GPs include GMS Unrestricted Principles. PMS Contracted GPs. PMS Salaried GPs. Restricted Principle. Assistants. Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA) and PMS Others

[3] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principles PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Selected GPs

[4] Date has been converted to match boundaries as at April 2002

Source

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many salaried *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* dentists are employed in the Camden and Islington area. [79643]

Mr. Hutton: These figures are on a headcount basis rather than whole time equivalent (wte) and take no account of part-time working. Dentists working in more than one dental service are included in each service.

These figures exclude self employed principal dentists working in the general dental service (GDS) and their assistants.

Number of salaried dentists working in the NHS at 30 September 2001 Camden and Islington Health Authority

Health Authority	Salaried service of General Dental Service	Personal Dental Service	Community Dental Service[1]	Hospital Dental Service[1]	Total[1]
Camden and Islington	1	1	20	110	130

Notes:
[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.

The table below shows data for salaried general practitioners which as been taken from the latest mini census (31 March 2002).

Salaried General Medical Practitioners in Camden & Islington Health Authority, London RO and England as at 31 March 2002
numbers (headcount)

	England		London RO		Camden & Islington HA	
	Total	of which Salaried	Total	of which Salaried	Total	of which Salaried
All Practitioners	32,011	4,452	4,674	764	275	54
of which						
Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[1]	27,956	489[2]	3,970	84[2]	224	5[2]
Restricted Principals	92	0	24	0	2	0
Assistants	476	476	173	173	9	9
GP Registrars	1,908	1,908	264	264	27	27
Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA)	100	100	35	35	6	6
PMS Other	326	326	83	83	1	1
GP Retainers	1,153	1,153	125	125	6	6

Notes:
[1] Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs) includes GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.
[2] Salaried UPEs data are to be treated with caution Salaried PMS Principals data were not submitted by the majority of Health Authorities. This is likely to be an underestimate.
Source:
General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's estimate is of the average number of patients allocated to each general practitioner in the Camden and Islington area. [79645]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Unrestricted Principals And Equivalents (UPEs)[1] And Average List Size As At 30 September 2001
numbers (headcount)

	UPEs	Average List Size
England Total	27,843	1,841
of which		
London RO	3,962	1,985
of which:		
Camden & Islington HA	225	2,039

Note:
[1] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.
Source:
General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of nurses starting work in the NHS in the last year were trained overseas. [75527]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 October]:* The Department does not collect information on the number of nurses working in the National Health Service who were trained overseas.

Foundation Trusts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has established a foundation trust consultative group. [76864]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 October 2002]:* The Department has not established a foundation trust consultative group. However, the initial framework for policy on National Health Service foundation trusts was developed through consultation with the first cohort of three-star NHS trusts as part of a series of national events on earned autonomy. In addition, Departmental officials have been seeking views from a number of chief executives from several different NHS trusts, primary care trusts, strategic health authorities and from other sources. These discussions have provided an important sounding board for our proposals.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his formulation of foundation status for hospitals has involved consideration of a voucher system for patients or GPs. [79246]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* We have not considered any form of voucher system for patients or general practitioners in developing our proposals for the creation of National Health Service foundation trusts. NHS foundation trusts will provide free care for NHS patients according to NHS principles, based on clinical need and not ability to pay.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many three star trusts have indicated an interest in becoming foundation trusts. [79247]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Thirty-one of the acute National Health Service trusts that were awarded three stars in the previous NHS performance ratings announced in 2001 submitted expressions of interest in becoming NHS foundation trusts. We have not however asked for expressions of interest since publication of the new NHS performance ratings in July 2002.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce which 12 NHS trusts have been chosen to be foundation trusts. [79248]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* We expect to announce a list of trusts that have been successful in their applications to become first-wave National Health Service foundation trusts later next year.

Angiograms

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals *(a)* include and *(b)* exclude angiograms from (i) inpatient and (ii) outpatient waiting lists; and if he will make a statement. [75993]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 October 2002]:* This information is not centrally available at present as waiting times are collected by specialty not procedure. We are investing £65 million New Opportunities Fund money and £15 million Treasury Capital Modernisation Fund money to expand angiography facilities. When completed, this should allow an extra 14,000 angiograms to take place each year. The planning and priorities framework for 2003–06 sets the National Health Service a target to reduce waiting times for angiography and we plan to monitor progress against this target.

Job Vacancies

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many job vacancies there were at *(a)* administrative assistant or equivalent, *(b)* administrative officer or equivalent, *(c)* administrative executive officer, *(d)* higher executive officer, *(e)* senior executive officer, *(f)* grade 7 principal and *(g)* all positions above grade 7 level in his Department for jobs located in *(h)* London and *(i)* the South East between 1st April 2001 and 31st March; and what is the total employment for each Civil Service grade. [76550]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The information requested is contained in the table below.

Table Showing Position as at 1 April 2001

Responsibility Level	*London Region*		*South East Region*	
	*Vacancies**	*Total Staff*	*Vacancies**	*Total Staff*
Grades 6 and above	21	120	2	6
Grade 7	42	436	1	41
Senior Executive Officer	55	385	6	38
Higher Executive Officer	33	326	5	22
Executive Officer	88	630	1	39
Administrative Officer	70	470	9	34
Administrative Assistant	9	110	–	8
Total Non-Industrial Staff	318	2,477	24	188

Source:

* Expressed as numbers of staff recruited—we have no information on numbers of unfilled vacancies

Waiting List Targets

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend waiting list targets to psychologists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. [77841]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The NHS Plan outlined that the maximum inpatient wait will be reduced in stages from 18 months to six months by the end of 2005. The maximum wait for a first outpatient appointment with a consultant will be three months by the end of 2005.

Sheep Meat

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to ban from the food chain meat from the breeds of sheep that are susceptible to scrapie. [78362]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Scrapie is not known to be transmissible to humans. Nonetheless there is a theoretical risk that the occurrence of apparent scrapie cases may be concealing BSE in sheep. The question of appropriate precautionary and advisory action to protect and inform consumers about this risk has been extensively considered and publicised by the Food Standards Agency in recent times.

The European Commission has meanwhile issued proposals for action amongst other things to prevent certain susceptible sheep from entering the food chain. These proposals relate only to those holdings where scrapie has been confirmed as present.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of ambulance response times to category A calls by the East Midlands Ambulance Trust in *(a)* the county of Rutland and *(b)* the Melton Borough Council area were achieved within eight minutes in the last period for which figures are available; for those responses which took longer than eight minutes, how long it took for the ambulance to respond; and if he will make a statement. [78752]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Information on Category A 999 response times for the County of Rutland or the Melton Borough Council area is not available. The activities for these two areas are monitored as part of the East Midlands Ambulance Service.

The latest information about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the

Government's target response times for the East Midlands Ambulance NHS Trust, and all other ambulance trusts, is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2001-02".

During that period, East Midlands Ambulance Service responded to 73.1 per cent. of Category A 999 calls within the East Midlands area within 8 minutes.

I understand that since 1 September 2002, ambulance service cover has been increased in Melton, Oakham and Market Harborough by an additional 81 vehicle hours per day.

Vitamin B6

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the strength of Vitamin B6 when used for *(a)* countering heart disease and *(b)* female hormone control, in the light of the Food Standards Agency's report on safe maximum dosages; and if he will make a statement. [79330]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* There is epidemiological evidence that homocysteine is an independent risk factor for cardiovascular disease (CVD) and increasing levels of some B vitamins, including B6, may reduce blood levels of homocysteine. However, there is not yet conclusive evidence that reducing blood homocysteine—through increased intake of B vitamins—has a direct impact on the incidence of CVD. There are on-going randomised controlled trials assessing the impact of lowering homocysteine levels on the incidence of heart disease.

The evidence to date suggests that B6 may have a positive effect on pre-menstrual symptoms, but this is based on limited information from poor quality trials. Further trials are required to confirm an association.

The expert group on vitamins and minerals (EVM) was asked to advise on the safety of intakes of vitamins and minerals in food supplements and fortified foods. The EVM was not asked to consider the beneficial effects of the vitamins and minerals under consideration, although nutritional need was taken into account to ensure that safe upper levels were not set at a level below dietary requirements.

The EVM draft report is the work of an independent advisory group, currently out to public consultation and available on the Food Standards Agency website.

Over-30-Months Scheme

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the Over-30-Months Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [79239]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that it is currently undertaking a review of the over thirty months rule, under which the sale for human consumption of meat from cattle aged over thirty months at slaughter is prohibited. The Agency is being assisted in the review by a joint Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee/FSA risk assessment group and a stakeholder group, and will issue regular information about the review as it proceeds. The Agency is expecting to report its findings from the review in the first half of next year.

Health Care Assistants

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will estimate how many health care assistants work in the NHS and list the titles they work under; and if he will make a statement. [79732]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* Healthcare assistants and other health care support workers work across the range of clinical National Health Service services. The Department and the NHS have developed titles used to identify them over a period of time. Groups identified in the table comprise the total group of clinical health care support staff working in the NHS.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): "Healthcare Assistants" by area of work in England as at 30 September 2001

	whole-time equivalents	*headcount*
All staff	*152,893*	*204,925*
Healthcare assistants[1]	25,170	29,764
Nursing assistant/auxiliary	89,063	123,617
STT Helper/assistant	19,300	25,298
Support staff[1]	19,360	26,246

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest whole number Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts
[1] Includes staff in Acute, elderly & general, paediatrics, maternity, psychiatry, learning difficulties, community services, chiropody, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, radiography, speech and language therapy, pathology and other STT.
Source:
Department of Health non-medical workforce census

Imported Meats

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Food Standards Agency in terms of assessing the safety of imported meat. [79279]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Department of Health Ministers have regular discussions with the Food Standards Agency (FSA). I am satisfied that the FSA is making use of the best available science in assessing the safety of imported meat, and is applying proportionate controls on declared meat imports. The Meat Hygiene Service, which is an executive agency of the FSA, has been particularly effective in checking consignments of imported carcass beef for the presence of specified risk material. The FSA is also playing a full part in the Government's programme of action against illegally smuggled meat.

Professional Qualifications

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proposal for a Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications, with reference to its impact on *(a)* the regulation of health professionals and *(b)* patient safety. [79731]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* The draft Directive has been the subject of consultation and continuing negotiation. A number of specific concerns have been expressed about the need to ensure patient safety and service quality, which we will take into account as discussions progress.

Birthweight

Mr. Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will list the incidence of low birthweight by county in descending order, for the most recent year for which available figures exist. [76155]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 7 November 2001

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on incidence of low birthweight babies by county in descending order, for the most recent year for which available figures exist. [76155]

The number and percentage of low birthweight live births that occurred in 2001 are given in the table below, for each county in England, and for the whole of Wales, in descending order.

Number and percentage of low birthweight[1] live births by English counties[2] and Wales in descending order, 2001

Area of usual residence	*Number*	*Percentage*[3]
West Midlands (Metropolitan County)	3,137	9.5
West Yorkshire (Metropolitan County)	2,254	8.8
Lancashire, former county of	1,349	8.6
Tees Valley less Darlington	513	8.5
Greater Manchester (Metropolitan County)	2,491	8.3
Bedfordshire, former county of	608	8.3
Staffordshire, former county of	884	8.2
Greater London (Metropolitan County)	8,425	8.1
South Yorkshire (Metropolitan County)	1,104	8.0
Nottinghamshire, former county of	849	8.0
Leicestershire, former county of	835	8.0
Merseyside (Metropolitan County)	1,131	7.8
The Humber	694	7.8
Berkshire, former county of	755	7.5
Wales	2,288	7.5
Herefordshire and Worcestershire, former county of	529	7.4
Tyne and Wear (Metropolitan County)	820	7.4
Buckinghamshire, former county of	609	7.3
Derbyshire, former county of	733	7.3
Warwickshire	382	7.3
Durham, former county of	422	7.2
Wiltshire, former county of	493	7.2
Northamptonshire	528	7.2
Shropshire, former county of	322	7.2
Cambridgeshire, former county of	563	7.1
Hampshire, former county of	1,224	7.0
Kent, former county of	1,222	6.9
West Sussex	532	6.9
Lincolnshire	413	6.9
Cumbria	317	6.8
Oxfordshire	479	6.8
Gloucestershire	394	6.8
Norfolk	499	6.7
Dorset, former county of	414	6.7
Bristol/Bath area	727	6.7
East Sussex, former county of	482	6.5
Somerset	307	6.5
Cheshire, former county of	678	6.5
Cornwall (and Isle of Scilly)	289	6.5
Suffolk	449	6.5
Hertfordshire	797	6.3
Devon, former county of	618	6.3
Isle of Wight, former county of	69	6.2
Surrey	729	6.2
Essex, former county of	1,101	6.2
Northumberland	176	6.1
North Yorkshire, former county of	425	5.9

Notes:

1. Low birthweight babies are defined as those weighing under 2,500 grams
2. Data are presented for English counties, and former counties, based on boundaries as at 1 April 2002.
3. Low birthweight babies as a percentage of all livebirths with a stated birthweight.

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what the percentage incidence was of low birth weight babies, by local authority; for each of the last 20 years. [75881]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 7 November 2001

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on what the percentage incidence was of low birthweight babies, by local authority; for each of the last 20 years. [75881]

The percentages for local authorities from 1990 to 2001 have been tabulated and I am placing copies in the House of Commons Library. Figures for comparable areas prior to 1990 are not readily available because of local government reorganisation.

Epilepsy

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many neurologists and paediatric neurologists with a specialism in epilepsy there are in the UK. [74051]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's workforce censuses do not collect information on the number of neurologists or paediatric neurologists with a specialism in the treatment of epilepsy.

As at 31 March 2002, the numbers of consultants working in neurology was 372 and the number of paediatric neurologists was 30. This represents increases in consultant numbers of 34 per cent. and 30 per cent. respectively since 1997.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* neurologists, *(b)* paediatric neurologists and *(c)* nurses with a specialism in epilepsy there are in the UK. [72659]

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many neurologists and paediatric neurologists with a specialism in epilepsy there are in the UK; [72764]

(2) what plans there are to increase the number of neurologists and paediatric neurologists with a specialism in epilepsy. [72765]

Mr. Hutton: pursuant to his reply, 24 July 2002, column 1415W and 1408W: I regret my previous answers were incorrect.

The second paragraph should read,

"As at 31 March 2002, the numbers of consultants working in Neurology was 372 and the number of paediatric neurologists was 30. This represents increases in consultant numbers of 34 per cent. and 30 per cent. respectively since 1997."

Diagnostic Testing

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received concerning the cost of repeating diagnostic tests unnecessarily. [75752]

Ms Blears: We have not received any representations about the costs of repeating diagnostic tests for cancer patients. The cancer services collaborative is working in every cancer network to modernise cancer care by streamlining and redesigning the care pathway ensuring patients receive speedy diagnosis and treatment.

Cancer Care

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to *(a)* adopt on-call arrangements, *(b)* extend working hours during the week and *(c)* operate a 24-hour service for cancer services within the NHS; [75754]

(2) what representations his Department has received concerning cancer departments *(a)* adopting on-call arrangements, *(b)* extending working hours during the week and *(c)* operating a 24-hour service. [75753]

Ms Blears: Commissioners and providers need to consider the needs of their population when planning services. This may involve access to some services out of normal working hours, such as general practitioner and community nurse advice, palliative care support and for some patients, access to other specialist advice.

To date, the Department has received no representations concerning cancer departments adopting on-call arrangements, extending working hours during the week and operating a 24 hour service for cancer services within the National Health Service.

Travel Assistance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what assistance is made available by each health authority to patients travelling for treatment. [75200]

Jaqui Smith: Where a patient has a medical need for transport as determined by the clinician in charge of their case, then transport should be provided free of charge, as part of National Health Service treatment. Where patients need financial assistance the hospital travel cost scheme has been established as part of the NHS low income scheme. This provides financial assistance to the patients who do not have a medical need for ambulance transport, but who nevertheless, require assistance in meeting the cost of travel to hospital for transport.

Spinal and Orthopaedic Surgeons

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of additional spinal and orthopaedic surgeons that will be needed within the next 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [77225]

Mr. Hutton: As at March 2002, there were 1,303 consultants in trauma and orthopaedic surgery. This represents an increase of 23 per cent. since September 1997.

The NHS Plan workforce numbers targets identify the staff needed to meet overall needs up until 2008. By this time, the latest forecasts for growth expect the National Health Service to have net increases over a 2001 baseline, of at least 15,000 doctors—consultants and GPs. This expectation is for total numbers of doctors and is not specialty-specific.

The NHS is currently working on local delivery plans for a three-year period, which will identify the demand for additional trauma and orthopaedic consultants up until 2005–06. The NHS will continue to plan, for three-year periods, its future workforce requirements and steps will be taken to address the identified need.

We continually review future requirements for trained specialists as part of the NHS's new multi-disciplinary workforce planning processes. These will look at the requirements for doctors alongside other staff focusing on the potential for new ways of working and developing new roles.

Breast Cancer

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the patents on breast cancer genes owned by Myriad Inc on testing for hereditary breast cancer; and what negotiations his Department is involved in with Myriad on this issue. [77878]

Ms Blears: The Department is still in discussion with Myriad and the discussion is confidential at this stage.

Dr. Gibson: To k the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on objections made to the European patent office to the patents on breast cancer genes owned by Myriad Inc. [77877]

Ms Blears: A number of European genetics research institutes have filed objections in the European Patents Office (EPO). We await the outcome of the hearings before the EPO with interest.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the target population for breast cancer screening was changed; and what percentage of the target population was screened in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 in (i) England, (ii) each NHS region and (iii) each health authority. [79799]

Ms Blears: The National Health Service breast screening programme has been inviting women aged 50–64 to be screened every three years. The NHS Plan, published in July 2000, announced the extension of the programme to women aged 65 to 70. This extension is being rolled out over the three year period from 2001–2004.

Data for 2000–01 are in the Department's statistical bulletin which is available in the Library. Data on the number of women screened between the age of 65 and 70 are not yet available as the extension began in 2001–02. Data for 2001–02 will be available in the Department's next statistical bulletin, which is due to be published early 2003.

MRI Scanner (Pembury Hospital)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce whether to site a replacement permanent MRI scanner at Pembury hospital. [77559]

Ms Blears: At this time I cannot give the hon. Member any information on an announcement. I will write to him on this matter as soon as possible.

Dental Services

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further steps he plans to take to increase provision of NHS dental services in Lancashire; and if he will make a statement. [77937]

Jacqui Smith: In East Lancashire the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Personal Dental Service has brought five whole time National Health Service dentists into the area together with a part-time dental therapist. The personal dental service (PDS) pilot provides NHS dental care for non-registered patients and for people finding difficulty in registering with a general dental practitioner. PDS pilots in the Preston, Blackpool and Chorley areas are also exploring new ways of providing NHS dentistry in their localities. A new NHS dental access centre will also open in Lancaster next year.

Three bids have also been made against the "Options for Change" funding to try and improve dental access and waiting times in Lancashire. A decision on these bids as well as other bids will be made in the near future.

Speech Therapy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many children with severe learning difficulties received help from a speech therapist in each year from 1997 to 2001; [78369]

(2) how much money was allocated from health to education services to provide speech therapy to children with *(a)* moderate learning difficulties and *(b)* severe learning difficulties in each year from 1997 to 2001; and if he will make a statement. [78371]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of children with severe learning difficulties who receive help from speech and language therapists (SLTs) is not collected centrally.

It is very important that children with speech and language difficulties access appropriate intervention as soon as a problem is identified. The majority of SLTs are employed by the National Health Service and deliver services relating to children's health need. They are often based in the community and may work in health, education or local authority settings.

No money was transferred from the Department of Health to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) specifically to provide speech therapy to children with learning difficulties. For the two years between 1999 and 2001, DfES made grant support available under the standards fund to a number of local education authorities for speech and language pilots.

This support was extended to all English local education authorities in 2001–02 to help them enhance speech and language therapy services for children in conjunction with the NHS and the voluntary sector. It is one of a number of sub heads on which LEAs can spend their special educational needs allocation.

Meningitis

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the measures to increase awareness of meningitis and their allocated funding have been for each year since 1997; [78945]

(2) what measures are in place to ensure the vaccination for meningitis of all students in state and public education and for a detailed breakdown of the cost of these measures; [78946]

(3) what representation his Department has received concerning *(a)* raising public awareness and *(b)* education in schools of meningitis. [78943]

Ms Blears: Since 1997, information about meningitis and septicaemia has been included in both the *Guide to Childhood Immunisations* and the *Guide to Pre-school Immunisations*. These leaflets are made available to all parents of every new baby and all parents of every preschool child. They are distributed largely via primary care and the *Guide to Childhood Immunisations* is given to all new parents by the health visitor at the ten day visit. More than one million of these leaflets are distributed, on an annual basis, in England.

The immunisation website www.immunisation.nhs.uk also contains information about meningitis and septicaemia.

A targeted campaign, *Look out for your mate*, has been running in all higher education establishments since 1995. The resources alert new students to the signs and symptoms or meningitis and septicaemia and suggest appropriate action. The cost of this work has been approximately £15,000 per annum. During the introduction of the MenC vaccine we worked closely with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service to ensure that all students had this important information.

In addition the Department also works with a number of meningitis charities, for example the meningitis research foundation, that produce guidance on the diagnosis and early management of meningococcal disease. This work is published as leaflets and information packs and is also available on the charities' web-sites.

Cancer

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of cancer patients are comorbid; and *(a)* how many and *(b)* what proportion of cancer patients there were in each year since 1998. [78950]

Ms Blears: The Department does not centrally hold information on co-morbidity of cancer patients. In some instances this information will be held locally for research and/or public health purposes though it is not generally published.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instruments have been developed to classify different comorbid diseases; and whether a comorbidity index is a cancer registry requirement. [78951]

Ms Blears: There are several methods of monitoring co-morbidity currently available: these include the Kaplan-Feinstein Index, the Cumulative Illness Rating Scale (CIRS) and the Adult Comorbidity Evaluation (ACE 27). However, not all methodologies are appropriate to all tumour types.

Due to the complexities of applying a co-morbidity standard to all cancers there are no current plans to incorporate a co-morbidity index into registry datasets.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the data reporting standards for cancer, broken down by stage. [78949]

Ms Blears: Collected information on cancer services is restricted to aggregate returns to measure performance against the waiting times targets in the NHS Cancer Plan and data collected to monitor National Health Service screening services. The Department does not collect data on cancer patients broken down by stage of disease.

Some information on stage is collected by cancer registries but not for all cancer types, although coverage for this data is incomplete and as such it is not therefore published.

Fragile X Syndrome

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation has been undertaken with people with Fragile X syndrome and their families in connection with the Valuing People White Paper. [79373]

Jacqui Smith: The White Paper *Valuing People* sets out our proposals for improving services for people with learning disabilities, their families and carers. The strategy takes a cross-Government, cradle to grave, approach to a wide range of services—social care, health, education, employment, benefits, housing, transport, leisure—for people with every kind of learning disability, including Fragile X syndrome. We have made good progress in putting in place the framework for delivery promised in the White Paper.

We involved a large number of individuals and organisations, including people with learning disabilities and their carers, when developing the White Paper: we have continued that approach by including all these parties in the learning disability task force and learning disability partnership boards, which are overseeing its implementation. We have not consulted specifically on each type of learning disability or condition, but the approach we have taken makes clear that *Valuing People* includes everyone with a learning disability.

Nursing Care Payments

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what conditions are applied to payments of *(a)* attendance allowance and *(b)* payments towards nursing care; [79456]

(2) what right of appeal care home residents have against funding decisions taken by *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* Social Services. [79455]

Jacqui Smith: The guidance and directions on free nursing care describe the eligibility, review and appeal arrangements, copies of which are in the Library. These are also are available at www.doh.gov.uk/jointunit/nhsfundednursingcare/index.htm. The National Health Service and social services have complaint procedures that people can follow if they are dissatisfied with aspects of their care.

The eligibility of anyone in receipt of attendance allowance is not affected by NHS funding, though councils will need to take account of the receipt of this and other benefits if they carry out a financial assessment.

A and E Departments

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure that funding, made available to ease the burdens in accident and emergency departments, is reaching the front-line to *(a)* allow innovative schemes to continue and *(b)* give all accident and emergency departments the opportunity to introduce new ways of working. [79267]

Jacqui Smith: The *Reforming Emergency Care* strategy was launched in October 2001, supported by £118 million investment, to improve the local organisation of emergency services to ensure that patients get a consistent and appropriate response based on national clinical standards. The strategy will be delivered through the formation of emergency care networks (ECNs), which will co-ordinate all aspects of local emergency care through the local leadership of emergency care leads (ECLs) appointed in all acute trusts and primary care trusts.

The Government places a very high priority on improving delivery of emergency care. The NHS Plan set challenging targets for strategic health authorities and trusts to cut waiting times in accident and emergency (A&E). The new devolved funding arrangements mean that local managers are able to target funding, in line with national guidelines, on local areas of need. Local managers and clinicians are being supported to develop and maintain innovative ways of delivering care through the Modernisation Agency emergency services collaborative, launched on 8 October 2002. The first wave of the collaborative is now underway and by September 2004, every trust with an A&E in England will have completed the programme.

Sight Loss

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional investment is planned for *(a)* prevention, *(b)* detection and *(c)* rehabilitation of sight loss. [79761]

Jacqui Smith: The National Health Service is receiving unprecedented growth for investment across health services. We have set a new target for the NHS to improve diabetic retinopathy screening. We have also invested £20 million to modernise cataract services. Furthermore, free NHS sight tests for everyone aged 60 and over were reintroduced from April 1999, at an annual cost of £50 million.

The Department is also contributing a grant of more than £120,000 over three years to a group of voluntary organisations to set up local low vision services committees. These bring together the NHS, social services, opticians and voluntary organisations to promote best practice and improve co-ordination in the commissioning and delivery of services for the blind and partially sighted.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in each of the nations of the UK have a sight problem. [79762]

Jacqui Smith: The information shown in the table relates to the number of people registered blind and partially sighted.

Number of people registered as blind and partially sighted

	No. registered blind	*No. registered partially sighted*
As at 31 March 2000		
England	158,000	149,000
Scotland	24,839	13,287
As at 31 March 2001		
Wales	9,902	9,905

This information is not currently collected in Northern Ireland.

Laming Report

Ms Debra Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the Laming Report has not yet been published; and when and how it will be published. [79743]

Jacqui Smith: We expect to receive Lord Laming's report into the circumstances that led to the death of Victoria Climbié later this year or early next year. However, neither we nor Lord Laming have set a timetable. The report will be published by my right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for Health and the Home Department soon after its receipt and will be made widely available.

Waiting Times

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are waiting for assessment for *(a)* homecare aids, *(b)* adaptations and *(c)* equipment in each social services department area in the UK; and what the average waiting time for assessment in each area was in the last 12 months. [79976]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not available centrally and may be possible to obtain only by approaching individual social service departments.

The government is investing in services for community equipment and minor adaptations over the years 2001 to 2006. The funding will help these services reduce waiting times in line with the targets set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, in a statement to the House on 23 July 2002 that, as part of the single assessment process, assessments will be complete with one month of referral and equipment then delivered within seven working days.

Breast Feeding

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on Government policy on encouraging breastfeeding. [79890]

Ms Blears: The Government are fully committed to the promotion of breastfeeding, which is accepted as the best form of nutrition for infants. The National Health Service priorities and planning framework for 2003–2006 includes a challenging new target to deliver

an increase of two percentage points per year in breastfeeding initiation rate, focusing especially on women from disadvantaged groups. The Infant Feeding Survey 2000 showed that the incidence of breastfeeding in England and Wales increased from 68 per cent. in 1995 to 71 per cent. in 2000, but varied between different social classes and the incidence of breastfeeding in social class *v.* increased from 50 per cent. in 1995 to 59 per cent. in 2000.

We have recently published for consultation proposals to replace the war-time welfare food scheme with a new programme which would provide better nutrition and greater choice for over 800,000 people in low income families. The current scheme may act as a disincentive for women to breastfeed.

The infant feeding initiative was launched in 1999 to tackle health inequalities with the aim to increase the incidence and duration of breastfeeding amongst those groups of the population where breastfeeding rates are the lowest. To date, 79 local projects have been funded to identify "best practice" to increase breastfeeding rates. The best start project is a randomised control trial looking at an intervention into midwives practice and the impact on breastfeeding duration. The results will be disseminated later this year.

The national breastfeeding awareness week (NBAW) was held in May 2002 with a theme on normalising breastfeeding. NBAW will also be held in May 2003.

Shared Financial Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the timing of NHS trust moving over to using shared financial services centres. [79894]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service is currently developing two shared financial service centres, in Leeds and Bristol. Approximately 40 NHS organisations will be moving over, in waves, to use these centres from April 2003 through October 2003.

If these pilot centres successfully deliver the proof of concept of shared financial services in the NHS consideration will be given to roll-out to the wider NHS.

Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of health authorities have complaints procedures for mental health patients. [80000]

Jacqui Smith: The National Health Service complaints procedure exists to deal with complaints from any patient using the NHS (including users of mental health services) who wishes to make a complaint about the service or treatment they have received. The complaints procedure applies to all NHS organisations and services.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of mental health patients are delayed from hospital discharge in 2001–02 and what the reasons are for the delays; and if he will make a statement. [79997]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not hold information on the proportion of mental health patients who were delayed from hospital discharge.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding was given to children's mental health services in each year since 1997. [79991]

Jacqui Smith: Levels of funding provided by health and local authorities (LAs) for child and adolescent mental health services are not collected centrally. In the four years ending 31 March 2003, we will have made available £105 million of targeted central funding across the National Health Service and LAs in support of the Government's strategy, introduced in 1999, for developing child and adolescent mental health services. Health authorities will have been given £50 million and LAs £55 million. The latter includes provision for extended funding in support of 24 innovation projects to develop new approaches to mental health services for children and young people.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress made to replace Shelton Hospital with a new mental health hospital. [79992]

Jacqui Smith: The specialist mental health services strategy for Shropshire County and Telford & Wrekin recommended the redevelopment of in-patient mental health services alongside the development of a range of community mental health services. Shropshire County Primary Care Trust is now recruiting a project manager to lead the redevelopment programme and is establishing a project board to oversee the project. It is expected that the formal business case procedures will be undertaken in 2003, with a provisional target date of Spring 2006 for the redevelopment of in-patient mental health services. This will be subject to public consultation.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of health authorities have a written care plan for mental health patients; [80002]

(2) what proportion of mental health patients have been given a written copy of their own care plan in the last 12 months; [79999]

(3) what proportion of mental health patients have been given written information on *(a)* their condition, *(b)* their treatment, *(c)* their medical rights and *(d)* where to get help in an emergency in the last 12 months. [79998]

Jacqui Smith: People with mental health problems whose care is co-ordinated under the care programme approach (CPA) should have information about their condition, treatment and how to get help in an emergency. Progress on achieving the target set within the 2001–2 service and financial framework for specialist mental health service users on enhanced CPA to have a written copy of their care plan continues to be monitored, although it is not broken down at strategic health authority level. Data from the first quarter of 2002, the first time such information was captured, suggest that around 85 per cent. of patients had a written care plan at the time of discharge. We expect both data quality and the rate to improve with time and further information on progress will be available in due course.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of community treatment orders on reducing the number of homicides by people diagnosed by mental health problems. [79990]

Jacqui Smith: The introduction of community treatment orders will allow people to be treated in the setting which is most appropriate to their own individual needs by breaking the automatic link between compulsory treatment for a mental disorder and detention in hospital which exists under the current Mental Health Act 1983. This will also help to ensure that there are hospital beds available for those who most need them, whether to protect their own health and safety or that of others. There has been no assessment of the effectiveness of community treatment orders on reducing the number of homicides because this is not the intended purpose of the orders as proposed in the draft Mental Health Bill.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what proportion of schizophrenics have asked for, but been refused, hospital admission in the last 12 months. [80001]

Jacqui Smith: There have been no reports of people with schizophrenia being refused hospital admission collected centrally.

The mental health national service framework explicitly states that everyone with severe mental illness should have access to the range of services they need.

Testicular Cancer

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce the incidence of testicular cancer; and if he will make a statement. [79987]

Ms Blears: 91 per cent. of men with testicular cancer survive five or more years. Testicular cancer is almost always curable if found early. We have recently worked with Cancer Research UK to produce a new leaflet for men, *Testicular Cancer: Spot the Symptoms Early*. The leaflet aims to promote testicular awareness for men, explaining that they should know what is normal for them, know what changes to look out for and to report any changes without delay.

Nuclear Weapons Testing

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with counterparts in other countries whose nationals have participated in the monitoring of atmospheric nuclear weapons testing in respect of the impact the tests have been perceived to have had on the health of those exposed to radiation. [79966]

Ms Blears: The international forum for debate on these issues is the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR). Members of the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), which advises the Government on radiation Risks, participate in UNSCEAR as members and use the data generated to inform NRPB's risk calculations.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how many *(a)* children and *(b)* vulnerable adults that will be cared for by adults who had not received a Criminal Records Bureau check following the announcement of 1st November. [80022]

Jacqui Smith: The announcement of 1 November made no changes to the requirements for people working with children to have an appropriate Criminal Records Bureau check. The measures being taken will help combat the delays in the checking process. New staff in adult care homes continue to need pre-employment CRB checks. CRB checks on existing staff have been postponed to 2004 but all other safeguards remain in place in respect of these workers, which include confirming previous employment history and taking up references.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects *(a)* nurses supplied by agencies and *(b)* staff supplied by domiciliary care agencies will be required to have Criminal Records Bureau checks. [80034]

Jacqui Smith: We intend to introduce the requirement for all nurses supplied by nurses agencies and all staff supplied by domiciliary care agencies to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check when we are confident that the CRB are able to cope with the demand.

Asylum Seekers

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of asylum seekers in each London borough who do not have access to a general practitioner; and if he will make a statement. [79640]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not made an estimation of the number of asylum seekers in each London Borough who do not have access to a general practitioner (GP). Asylum seekers are regarded as ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom and therefore entitled to free treatment by a GP. The use of initiatives such as local development schemes and personal medical pilots have assisted asylum seekers and other vulnerable sectors of the population accessing GPs and other primary care services.

Vulnerable Adults

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is putting in place to ensure the protection of vulnerable adults following the postponement of Criminal Records Bureau checks for people who work with vulnerable adults. [80028]

Jacqui Smith: A criminal record disclosure forms one of many checks persons caring for vulnerable adults must have in order to work with this client group. Measures are already in place to ensure the protection of vulnerable adults from abuse. Persons caring for vulnerable adults continue to be subject to rigorous pre-employment checks, including confirming previous employment history and taking up references, to ensure their suitability for the position in question. All those

occupations, which were subject to a criminal record check prior to the advent of the Criminal Records Bureau, will continue to be subject to such a check.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how long he expects the postponement of the implementation of the protection of vulnerable adults lists provided for in the Care Standards Act 2000 to last as set out in the announcement on 1 November; [80021]

(2) for how long the implementation of the protection of vulnerable adults lists as part of the Care Standards Act 2000 have been postponed. [79812]

Jacqui Smith: We intend to implement the protection of vulnerable adults list when we are confident that the Criminal Records Bureau are able to cope with the demand.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 810W, on care homes, which national providers he has written to regarding the failure to pass on free nursing care to residents. [80060]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 810W, which set out the reasons why this information could not be disclosed.

Foundation Trusts

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from hospital trusts or health bodies in the Camden and Islington area concerning the development of foundation hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [79642]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not received any representations from hospital trusts or health bodies in the Camden and Islington area concerning the development of National Health Service foundation trusts.

Day Surgery

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 29 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 742 W. what steps he will take to ensure day surgery facilities remain in Lichfield following the proposed construction of a new hospital in the City of Lichfield. [79049]

Mr. Hutton: Following the South Staffordshire strategic review public consultation, it was decided that day surgery should be concentrated at Tamworth and Cannock, in order to provide the highest quality facilities for South Staffordshire patients in purpose-built environments, and to maximise the potential of day surgery usage in the county, by concentrating three sites onto two.

Day surgery at Lichfield ended in December 2001 and there are no plans to re-provide day surgery in the new hospital at Lichfield. It is, however, planned that the new hospital will benefit from, for example, an improved minor injuries unit, better x-ray services, more examining rooms in the outpatients department and modern facilities for the public.

Correspondence

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters of 9 July and 16 September from the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling regarding MRI scanning services in West Kent. [79909]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent to the right hon. Member on 6 November.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight *(a)* dated 23 November 2001, concerning lens solutions and *(b)* dated 22 February, and transferred from DEFRA on 11 April. [72599]

Ms Blears: Replies to the hon. Member's letters of 23 November and 22 February were sent on 29 July and 21 August.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will reply to the letter written to him on 18 January by the hon. Member for Solihull, on behalf of his constituent Mr. Colin Reynard, of which letter a reminder was sent to him on 9 April, joining the interest of another constituent of the hon. Member, Mr. Brian Clayton; [67583]

(2) if he will reply to the letter written to his minister of state on 30 May, by the hon. Member for Solihull on behalf of his constituent Mr. G. L. Cotton; [67584]

(3) if he will acknowledge the letter written to him by the hon. Member for Solihull dated 2nd October; and if he will cause substantive responses to be made to the cases of Graham Cotton and Brian Clayton both of Solihull (PO1013296 and PO1014870); [78759]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 October 2002]:* The hon. Member has been invited to attend a meeting with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, to discuss the issues that his constituents have raised in his correspondence.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will write to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam regarding his answer of 14 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 481W, concerning the number of key targets set by his Department. [80018]

Mr. Lammy: A response to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam has now been sent.

Smallpox Vaccine

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the meetings between (i) ministers and (ii) officials in his Department with Powderject concerning the smallpox vaccine and *(b)* the names of those who attended those meetings; and if he will make a statement. [54660]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 May 2002]:* Ministers had no meetings with PowderJect concerning the placing of the smallpox vaccine contract. Officials from the Department and from the Ministry of Defence met with PowderJect on 22 January as part of the confidential discussions held with the five major pharmaceutical companies known to have smallpox vaccine manufacturing capability. The meeting was to

inform the company of our requirements for smallpox vaccine and to find out whether the company was in a position to meet our requirements and, if so, to invite them to submit their written proposals for vaccine supply. Since the award of the contract to PowderJect on 11 April, there have been two ad hoc meetings between officials from the Department and the Ministry of Defence with PowderJect to resolve matters of detail concerning labelling and packaging of the vaccine. As all discussions with the company were confidential, the names of those present are not being revealed. This is in accordance with normal policy.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at what intervals nurse recruitment agencies which have signed up to the ethical foreign nurse recruitment campaign will be reviewed. [74320]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 October 2002]:* The list of agencies that have confirmed they adhere to the code of practice has been placed on the international recruitment website. The list is monitored on an ongoing basis.

Workforce development confederations will bring to the attention of the Department any agencies that are not recruiting in accordance with the code of practice.

National Clinical Director of Primary Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP surgeries have been visited by the GP tsar in that capacity since his appointment. [75511]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 October 2002]:* Professor David Colin-Thome is a part-time practising general practitioner (GP) as well as the current National Clinical Director of Primary Care, a position which he occupies on a two day per week basis. Since his appointment in May 2001, he has visited 14 GP surgeries. He has, however, met considerably more GPs and other primary care professionals through attending conferences, seminars and other events, which average at well over one per week.

Foundation Hospitals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the organisations which have advised him on the development of foundation hospitals; and if he will list the fees incurred by his Department in obtaining advice on the development of foundation hospitals. [76811]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 October 2002]:* We have sought specialist advice from the New Economics Foundation, Pinsent Curtis Biddle and PricewaterhouseCoopers in developing proposals for the creation of National Health Service foundation trusts. To date, payments have been made to the New Economics Foundation and PricewaterhouseCoopers. Actual fees incurred are commercially confidential.

Organ Retention

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many organs are retained at Leicestershire hospitals from deceased persons. [77962]

Ms Blears: pursuant to her reply 4 November 2002, I regret the previous reply is incorrect. The first sentence should read:-

"There are currently 142 organs retained by the three hospitals covered by the University Hospitals of Leicester National Health Service Trust."

Devolution

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings his Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72716]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Information is not available in the form requested. Ministers from my Department have frequent meetings with Ministers from the Scottish Executive, both formal and informal, covering a broad range of topics.

General Chiropractic Council

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the General Chiropractic Council at 1st April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56873]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health (Yvette Cooper) on Thursday 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, volume 836, columns 588–89W.

Public Health Laboratories

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements will be in place to require local laboratories *(a)* to report to and *(b)* respond to requests from the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre after reorganisation of the service to create the Health Protection Agency; and if he will make a statement. [74819]

Ms Blears: All National Health Service laboratories as well as laboratories in the proposed health protection agency will be able to report to communicable disease surveillance centre (CDSC). These arrangements will be a continuation of the current system.

As at present, the CDSC will work with laboratories in the NHS and non-departmental public bodies on the appropriate reporting to meet local, regional and national requirements.

Departmental Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the schemes and initiatives sponsored by his Department and its agencies which are not the subject of national roll out, showing *(a)* the authorities or areas covered by the scheme and *(b)* the budget of the scheme in the last year for which information is available. [75671]

Mr. Hutton: The answer can only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Commission for Health Improvement

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* health authorities have failed service reviews conducted by the Commission for Health Improvement; and if he will make a statement; [76004]

(2) how many service reviews within *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* health authorities have been conducted by the Commission for Health Improvement; and if he will make a statement. [75995]

Mr. Hutton: The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) has power to undertake special investigations into particular areas of concern in the delivery of health care. To date, the CHI has completed seven investigations:

Five in Acute Trusts;

One relating to matters arising from the employment of a locum doctor in a NHS Trust;

One relating to issues arising from the case of a Loughborough GP.

A further three investigations are underway.

The CHI was set up on 1 November 1999 to meet our aim of improving the quality of patient care in the National Health Service. An important aspect of this work is a rolling programme to complete a clinical governance review of 500 NHS organisations by 2004. As at 1 October 2002, CHI has completed 175 clinical governance reviews across a range of NHS bodies of which 173 are NHS trusts and two health authorities.

Asthma

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence of asthma in West London is including percentage change over the last five years; and if he will make a statement on the latest information on causation. [76097]

Mr. Hutton: Prevalence data—the percentage of the population affected with asthma at a given time—is not available for specific areas such as west London, but figures for the United Kingdom are held.

An estimated 5.1 million people in the UK—1.4 million adults and 3.7 million children, one in 13 and one in eight respectively—are currently receiving treatment for asthma. An estimated eight million people in the UK have been diagnosed with asthma at some stage in their lives.

Information on admissions to hospital for asthma* in west London is detailed in the table.

Health Authority of residence	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*
QA2 Hillingdon HA	353	347	357	356	362
QA3 Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster HA	471	454	425	355	384
QAG Kingston & Richmond HA	433	300	419	361	303
QAJ Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth HA	1,117	1,033	976	832	756
QAR Brent & Harrow HA	684	538	491	507	647
QAV Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow HA	1,458	1,335	1,424	1,143	1,035
Total	4,516	4,007	4,092	3,554	3,487

Notes:
* ICD-10 (diagnosis) codes used are as follows:
J45 Asthma
J46 Status asthmaticus
The Health Authorities in this table are all of those which cover West, North West and South West London. Some HAs may also include eastern parts of London (such as Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA).
Data in this table are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Asthma has a genetic element. The predisposition to develop asthma is inherited with an increased risk if one or both parents have asthma. In addition environmental factors interact with the genetic predisposition to cause asthma to develop as a symptomatic condition.

Many different genes have been shown to be associated with allergy and asthma susceptibility, and different environmental factors are likely to influence outcomes in different ways depending on the underlying genotype.

Interaction between genes and environment in asthma is therefore a major focus of research in the asthma field. To this end, the national asthma campaign is making a large investment over the next two years funding a task force to address issues of causation. The task force will review the current evidence in this area and assess the feasibility of large scale, definitive studies to answer these questions.

Voluntary Organisations and Charities

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which voluntary organisations and charities departmental Ministers have met since the beginning of June. [78093]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's Ministers have met the following voluntary organisations and charities since the beginning of June:

Action on Smoking and Health
British Association for Adoption and Fostering
Barrow Cadbury Trust
Cancer Research UK
Cystic Fybrosis Trust
Dementia Services Collaborative
Diabetes UK
Disability Rights Commission
Doctor Patient Partnership
Empower
Epilepsy Action
Epilepsy Bereaved

Isabelle
Joint Epilepsy Council
Lymphoma Association
Macmillan Cancer Relief
National Council for Hospices and Specialist Palliative Care
NTract—National Translational Cancer Research Network
Parkinsons Disease Society
Pasque Children's Hospice
Project Cure
St John Ambulance
SANE
Re Think Severe Mental Illness
Sustain
Terence Higgins Trust

Ambulance Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what central Government targets have been set for ambulance services; and what assessment has been made of whether they are being met. [78097]

Jacqui Smith: Ambulance National Health Service trusts are aiming to respond to 75 per cent. of category A calls within eight minutes. All other emergency calls that are not life threatening should be responded to 95 per cent. of the time within 14 minutes in urban areas and 19 minutes in rural areas.

Information about ambulance services response times to emergency calls are collected each year by the Department and published annually. The latest information is contained in the Department of Health statistical bulletin *Ambulance Services, England 2001–02*. A copy is available in the Library and also on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/5b0115.htm.

Independent Sector Usage Survey

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to publish the results of the Independent Sector Usage Survey. [78099]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has carried out two surveys of National Health Service use of the independent sector for acute elective care in 2000–2001. The first survey, begun last October, sought information on actual use in the first half of the year, along with planned use in the second half of that year. Information on actual use in the second half of the year was sought in a further survey begun in August this year. The results of that further survey are now being collated. We will consider the best way to make the findings publicly available once the analysis of the second survey has been completed.

Stem Cell Research

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has received for stem cell research; and how many have been awarded. [77490]

Ms Blears: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has received nine applications for embryo research aimed at the production of embryonic stem cell lines, five of which have been granted and four are currently under consideration.

Paddington Basin Project

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had in the last six months with the management of the Paddington Health Campus. [77958]

Mr. Hutton: The Regional Director of the Directorate of Health and Social Care—London has participated in ongoing discussions with the management of the Paddington basin project together with the North West London Strategic Health Authority.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial recompense has been provided to Mr. Eric Sorenson the former project director of the Paddington Health Campus following his resignation on 4 October. [77957]

Mr. Hutton: Eric Sorensen, the former project director of the Paddington Health Campus is still employed by St. Mary's, The Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trusts and the Imperial College. As such, the terms of his employment are a matter for these employing organisations.

Drugs (Storage and Transport)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines have been given to *(a)* pharmacists and *(b)* primary care trusts to ensure that biological drugs are kept within recognised safe temperatures during storage and transport to patients. [78491]

Ms Blears: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA), an executive agency of the Department of Health, regulates medicinal products for human use in the United Kingdom on behalf of the UK Licensing Authority.

UK legislation places an obligation on licensed manufacturers, distributors and importers of medicinal products to exercise control over the distribution chain to ensure that the medicinal products are handled, stored and distributed under the necessary conditions to avoid deterioration of the products.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain's code of ethics and standards and practice guidance provides guidance to UK registered pharmacists on the storage of medicines under controlled temperatures.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that biological drugs brought into the UK by parallel importers maintain their temperature integrity during transport. [78490]

Ms Blears: United Kingdom legislation places an obligation on licensed distributors and importers of medicinal products to exercise control over the distribution chain, to ensure that the medicinal products are handled, stored and distributed under the necessary conditions to avoid deterioration of the products

Inspectors from the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) inspect parallel importers in the UK at regular intervals. The inspectors review records relating to the maintenance of temperature integrity during transportation of the imported products to ensure that they have not been exposed to unacceptable conditions.

Biological Drugs

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to compel pharmaceutical companies who manufacture biological drugs to ensure their delivery to patients maintain the drugs within recognised safe temperatures at all times. [78492]

Ms Blears: United Kingdom legislation places an obligation on licensed manufacturers and wholesale distributors of medicinal products to exercise control over the distribution chain to ensure that the medicinal products are handled, stored and distributed under the necessary conditions to avoid deterioration of the products.

Inspectors from the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) inspect manufacturers and distributors of medicines at regular intervals to ensure that they meet the statutory requirements concerning the maintenance of safe and appropriate storage and transportation temperatures of medicines.

Manufacturers and distributors who fail to comply with statutory requirements may be subject to formal action by the MCA in order to protect public health. This can include suspension or revocation of the manufacturing and/or wholesale distribution authorisations.

Patient Records

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* quantity and *(b)* proportion of patient records are computer-based; and what (i) quantity and (ii) proportion of cancer patient records are computer-based. [78948]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service has made significant strides in using information technology to support patient care. Although not individually counted as individual records, the majority of general practitioners have clinical systems containing patient specific information, hospitals have patient administration systems which hold both clinical and demographic information about patients. There are also a number of national applications that support national screening programmes, organ donation and the work of the blood authority.

It is not possible, however, to provide details of the quantity or proportion of cancer patients who have computer based records but the majority will have records in both the primary and secondary care arena which contain information about their specific diagnosis.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training requirements are in place for new doctors to enable them to handle electronic patient records. [75508]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 21 October 2002]* I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on Wednesday 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 397W.

Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what strategies his Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79291]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is committed to ensure that older people are never unfairly discriminated and complies with the rules and requirements of the *Minister's Rules for Selection, The Civil Service Order Council*, Treasury and equal opportunity and employment protection legislation. Ageism is not tolerated within the Department.

Our recruitment, development, performance management and retention policies are continuously reviewed. There are no age barriers to employment.

The Department is considering how best to implement the recommendations contained in the Government's *Winning the Generation Game* report, which examines age-related issues such as flexible retirement beyond the normal retiring age of 60.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of new recruits to his Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79303]

Mr. Hutton: The percentages anof new recruits aged over 50, who joined the Department during the past two years, are as follows:

1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001

	Total	*Percentage*
Total recruits	730	
Total recruits aged 50 or over	66	9

1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002

	Total	*Percentage*
Total recruits	627	
Total recruits aged 50 or over	129	21

Winter Mortality

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what research his Department has *(a)* carried out and *(b)* funded into excess winter mortality in other European Union countries. [79498]

Mr. Hutton: As a member state of the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom contributed to the funding of the EU *Eurowinter* project, which studied the relation of work related and culture related patterns of cold exposure to large and paradoxical differences in excess winter mortality within Europe. The project was co-ordinated by Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, and reports were published in *Lancet* on 10 May 1997 and *British Medical Journal* on 16 September 2000.

Biomedical Research

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 14 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 498W, on biotechnology research projects, what proportion of *(a)* the medical research council's—£362 million of research and development spending and *(b)* the Department of

Health's—£510 million research spending shown in Table 3 Looking Forward (Cm 5338) goes into biomedical research. [79515]

Ms Blears: All the research that the Medical Research Council (MRC) supports is biomedical research. An estimated 60 per cent. of the Department's research expenditure is used in the National Health Service to support research by the MRC, by medical research charities and by other research collaborators, a substantial part of which is to support the clinical stages of biomedical research. The Department and the NHS also directly fund health services' biomedical research; for example, through genetics knowledge parks and other programmes. Some 40 per cent. of the Department's policy research programme expenditure is on biomedical research.

CFS/ME

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has commissioned into the causes of myalgic encephalomyelitis. [79186]

Ms Blears: The Department has asked the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its grant-in-aid from my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade And Industry, via the Office of Science and Technology, to develop a broad strategy for advancing biomedical and health services research on chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME). The MRC has appointed an independent scientific advisory group, which will draw on the report of the Chief Medical Officer's Working Group, published in January 2002, on other recent expert reviews in this field and on research reported in the peer reviewed literature. The MRC is committed to the development of a research strategy for CFS/ME that will advance understanding of the aetiology, epidemiology and biology of CFS/ME and, in the light of current knowledge, suggest what areas of further research are needed with regard to possible prevention, management (including diagnosis) and treatment.

NICE Guidance

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the total cost to the NHS of guidance issued to date by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. [79714]

Ms Blears: The estimated full-year running costs of all National Institute for Clinical Excellence appraisal guidance issued up to and including appraisal guidance number 52, relative to previous levels of National Health Service spending where appropriate, amount to some £513 million for England. In some cases the financial impact on the NHS may build up gradually, for instance where infrastructure changes are needed to put the recommendations into full effect.

Agency Nurses

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the cost to the NHS of agency nurses was in each of the last six years in *(a)* England *(b)* each NHS region; [75637]

(2) How much was spent by the NHS on agency and bank nurses in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region, broken down by NHS trust, in each of the last six years. [79713]

Mr. Hutton: Data outlining the expenditure on non-National Health Service nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff is shown in the table. These figures include all agency staff and any other staff not directly employed by the individual NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts. A regional breakdown is not available prior to 1996–1997.

Region	*1995–1996 Expenditure £*	*1996–1997 Expenditure £*	*1997–1998 Expenditure £*	*1998–1999 Expenditure £*	*1999–2000 Expenditure £*	*2000–2001 Expenditure £*
Northern & Yorkshire	not available	6,028,667	6,714,833	7,504,774	9,670,403	11,687,978
Trent	not available	5,960,334	7,697,702	10,064,129	12,885,286	16,582,418
West Midlands	not available	16,939,663	20,265,855	26,503,757	32,564,528	37,964,326
North West	not available	9,570,017	13,211,621	17,857,451	23,917,194	31,022,389
Eastern	not available	14,055,474	15,719,904	22,670,380	30,951,975	42,387,041
London	not available	108,202,417	111,628,043	130,573,228	180,665,901	202,308,850
South East	not available	21,586,155	29,963,665	41,469,988	52,808,574	66,046,899
South West	not available	9,153,908	11,136,944	15,581,455	18,192,822	27,43[illegible],981
England Total	166,631,982	191,496,635	216,338,567	272,225,162	361,656,683	435,431,882

Source:
1. Annual financial returns for NHS Trusts, 1995–96—2000–01
2. Annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals, 1995–96
3. Annual financial returns for health authorities, 1996–97—2000–01
4. Annual financial returns for primary care trusts, 2000–01

Information on expenditure on non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff broken down by NHS trust has been placed in the Library. The Department is unable to disaggregate agency nursing costs only, nor provide information on bank nurses as requested.

Neonatal Services Review

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the neonatal services review; and if he will place a copy of *(a)* the review and *(b)* plans to change the configuration of services in the Library. [80051]

Jacqui Smith: I am considering the report following from a review of neonatal services and expect to determine the next steps in this process shortly.

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled *(a)* on the day of admission and *(b)* before the day of admission at Wythenshawe Hospital in each quarter since 1997. [79879]

Jacqui Smith: Wythenshawe Hospital is part of South Manchester University Hospitals National Health Service Trust, which comprises both Wythenshawe and Withington Hospitals. Separate figures are not available for each hospital individually or earlier than 1 April 2001.

Statistics are compiled for the total number of operations cancelled for non-clinical reasons. The figures do not differentiate between those cancelled on the day of admission and prior to admission.

Quarter ending	*Number of cancellations*
30 June 2001	82
30 September 2001	85
31 December 2001	327
31 March 2002	498
30 June 2002	445
30 September 2002	230

Mobile Decontamination

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS acute trusts do not have mobile decontamination facilities available. [79893]

Ms Blears: The Department has provided capital funding from a £5 million allocation in 2002–2003, which will enable all NHS acute trusts and ambulance service trusts to purchase mobile decontamination facilities and associated chemical personal protective clothing. The implementation programme is currently in progress and several individual trusts will still be awaiting delivery.

Vacancies

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there were for *(a)* medical and dental staff, *(b)* qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and *(c)* professions allied to medicine in (i) England, (ii) each NHS region and (iii) each health authority in 2001. [79798]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on Monday 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 117–122W.

Figures for March 2002 are now available and have been placed in the Library.

GP Access Targets

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of GP practices met the 24 and 48 hour access targets set out in the NHS Plan in *(a)* England, *(b)* each NHS region and *(c)* each primary care trust at the latest date for which figures are available. [79797]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested by strategic health authority and primary care trust for Quarter 1, 2002–2003 has been placed in the Library.

Hospital Transport

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 1197W, on hospital transport if he will make a statement on the contribution of voluntary providers to accident and emergency transport. [80041]

Jacqui Smith: Voluntary aided societies do occasionally convey patients to accident and emergency departments from say, sporting events and very occasionally they may provide support to statutory ambulance services.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer questions 76287 and 75990 from the hon. Member for Yeovil; and if he will make a statement. [80239]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 675W (Question 75990). I will write to the hon. Member in response to Question 76287 as soon as possible.

Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the annual cost was in 2001–02 to the NHS to social services of supporting people who suffer vision loss as a result of wet age-related macular degeneration; what assessment he has made of the impact of patients of the delay in NICE issuing guidance on the use of photodynamic therapy for age-related macular degeneration; and if he will provide funding for a nationally co-ordinated data collection exercise on the use of photodynamic therapy for age related macular degeneration; [76241]

(2) how many patients have access through ongoing clinical trials to photodynamic therapy for age-related macular degeneration; and how many patients will have access to this therapy as part of future clinical trials being planned. [76242]

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the NICE Committee will report its recommendations for age-related macular disease. [77842]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently conducting an appraisal of photodynamic therapy. This consultation has been extended to allow further consideration of the draft guidance. We cannot anticipate what NICE'S recommendations will be or assess what, if any, patients who are untreated at present will then be eligible for treatment. The Department will consider the implications of the final NICE guidance. We expect that guidance could be available to the National Health Service in January 2003, providing there are no appeals.

In the meantime, guidance issued in August 1999 to all NHS bodies asked them to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from NICE is not available at the time the technology first became available. These arrangements should involve an assessment of all the relevant factors including the available evidence on effect. The introduction of photodynamic therapy under these arrangements should be funded locally.

The Department does not collect data concerning the number of age-related macular degeneration patients currently receiving photodynamic therapy through clinical trials. We are also not in a position to estimate future access through clinical trials; the numbers involved would be a matter for the product manufacturer or others who are conducting the trial.

It is not possible to identify separately from the data collected from health and social services, the annual cost of supporting people who suffer vision loss as a result of the wet form of age-related macular degeneration.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of patients newly diagnosed with wet age related macular degeneration have access to photodynamic therapy for age-related macular degeneration through ongoing clinical trials; and what proportion of those patients will have access to this therapy as part of future clinical trials being planned; and if he will make a statement; [76336]

(2) if he will provide funding for the use of photodynamic therapy for age-related macular degeneration pending the completion of a nationally co-ordinated data collection exercise on clinical outcome, quality of life and costs associated with the treatment; and if he will make a statement. [76337]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North (Dr Gibson) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew) today.

NHS Reform

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department plans to hold strategic health authorities to account for the performance of the NHS within their area as set out in paragraph 7.2 of the document, Improvement, Expansion & Reform: The Next Three Years. [75715]

Mr. Hutton: From 2003–04, strategic health authorities (StHAs) will be required to produce local delivery plans, which will set out over a three year period their contribution towards the target and capacity assumptions detailed in *Improvement, Expansion & Reform: The Next Three Years*. Departmental monitoring systems will be aligned with these targets and assumptions to allow for regular monitoring and hold to account StHAs.

In addition Directorates of Health and Social Care are setting in place a series of regular performance reviews to manage performance with StHAs. These arrangements will be mirrored at StHA, primary care trust and trust levels.

Social Workers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 21 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 128–9W, on social workers, what the provisional figures are for the numbers of applications for social work training; what action he is taking to make existing social workers realise that their work is valued; how he plans to inform the public about what social workers actually do; and how much funding has been allocated to this initiative. [78190]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* The national social work recruitment campaign was launched in October 2001 by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health. It is aimed at informing the public about social work and social care and encouraging recruitment and retention. The funding for the campaign is £1.5 million in the year 2001–2002. This includes both national and local press and radio advertising and particular efforts are being made in some areas such as London and the south east that have more severe problems with recruitment and retention of social workers.

The third phase of the recruitment campaign was launched on 24 October 2002. The campaign consists of national advertising, leaflets, posters, local and national PR activity, a help line and a website. It has three aims:

To raise the number of people applying for social work training by 5000 by 2004.

To inform the public about what social workers actually do.

To make existing social workers realise that their work is valued.

Since the start of the campaign, there have been more than 40,000 callers to the telephone helpline and website. Applications have seen the first increase since 1995. The provisional figure suggests that over 5,000 have been received, which represents' a year on year increase of 8.3 per cent.

Silicone Cosmesis

Dr Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what sums were allocated for expenditure on silicone cosmesis for artificial limbs from the NHS community services budget in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04; and what sums were identified by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency as having been spent on silicone cosmesis for artificial limbs from that budget in (i) 2001 02 and (ii) 2002–03. [79041]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* Baseline allocations of £0.5 million in 2001–02, £1.5 million in 2002–03 and £2.0 million in 2003–04 were expected to be used for the provision of silicone cosmesis for artificial limbs. Spending on silicone cosmesis through the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency was £81,858 for 2001–02, and £182,841 so far in 2002–03.

Prison Service (Mental Health)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary for Health when he expects the Prison Service mental Health teams to have completed their review of the physical cell environment to reduce ligature points in *(a)* young offender institutions and *(b)* adult prisons. [78046]

Mr. Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply. The Prison Service's strategy to reduce self-inflicted deaths includes changes to the physical environment, such as the re-design of cell windows and furniture to reduce ligature points. It has already produced, tested and procured a safer cell design, a number of installations of which have already been completed and are in use. Safer cell designs address the design of furniture, toilets and basin fixtures, windows, lighting and heating. The Prison Service is also developing a second stage safer cell design as well as reviewing current cell furniture designs and producing new ones, so that standard-issue cell furniture may benefit from an improved reduced-ligature design.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sponsorships

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the schemes and initiatives sponsored by her Department and its agencies which are not the subject of national roll out, showing *(a)* the authorities or areas covered by the scheme and *(b)* the budget of the scheme in the last year for which information is available. [75667]

Dr. Howells: The following schemes and initiatives are sponsored by my Department in partnership with other funding bodies.

Space for Sports and Arts Programme (SSA)

Space for Sports and Arts Programme (SSA), is a partnership between traditional public expenditure of £75 million from the Capital Modernisation Fund and £55 million from the three Lottery distributors: New Opportunities Fund (£25 million), Sport England (£25 million) and Arts Council of England (£5 million).

The SSA programme is being rolled out in 65 local authorities in deprived areas. The budget for the programme is £130million from the beginning of 2000 to March 2004, which is the life of the programme. Approximately 297 projects are planned in the 65 local authorities. The Local Education Authorities (LEAs) invited to bid were:

Barking and Dagenham, Barnsley, Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Brent, Brighton & Hove, Bristol, City of Nottingham, Cornwall, Cumbria, Derby City, Derbyshire, Doncaster, Durham, East Sussex, Essex, Gateshead, Greenwich, Hackney, Hartlepool, Islington, Kent, Kingston-upon-Hull, Knowsley, Lambeth, Lancashire, Leeds, Leicester City, Lewisham, Liverpool, Luton, Manchester, Medway, Middlesbrough, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Newham, Norfolk, North Somerset, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Redcar and Cleveland, Rochdale, Rotherham, Salford, Sandwell, Sheffield, Slough, Somerset, South Tyneside, Southwark, St Helens, Stockton-on-Tees, Stoke-on-Trent, Sunderland, Tower Hamlets, Trafford, Walsall, Wirral, Wolverhampton.

Portable Antiquities Scheme

The Portable Antiquities Scheme was established in 1997 to encourage members of the public to report all finds of archaeological objects. Since Autumn 1997 DCMS has been funding six pilot schemes to promote voluntary reporting of all archaeological finds. These pilots were established in Kent, Norfolk, North Lincolnshire, North West (Cheshire, Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cumbria) West Midlands and Yorks. A further six pilots have been funded for three years by Heritage Lottery Fund since Spring 1999. These pilots were established in Dorset & Somerset, Hampshire, Northamptonshire, Suffolk, Wales, and in London.

A bid for a three-year funding for a national network of 41 posts at a cost of £1.5 million a year from April 2003 was approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund in May. This bid has 63 national and local partners each of whom is contributing 10 per cent. towards the cost.

In 2002–2003 the Department is providing £411,000 to support the current pilot schemes until the new funding comes on line.

The following schemes and initiatives are by public bodies sponsored by DCMS. These are not the subject of national roll out.

Splash Extra

This was a joint DCMS/Youth Justice Board programme of summer activities targeted on those 9–17 year olds identified as most at risk of offending in the areas covered across Government. A list of those areas covered will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Resourced by the New Opportunities Fund, and providing almost 300 estate-based schemes across England, Splash Extra established a menu of high quality sports, arts and personal development activities.

The budget was £8.5 million for the last financial year.

Sport (Social Agenda)

Patsy Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the contribution sport can make to meeting the Government's social agenda; and how much investment the Government are making in sports' governing bodies for delivering this purpose. [79183]

Mr. Caborn: A Sporting Future for All and the Government's Plan for Sport fully recognised the potential of sport and physical activity as a powerful tool for social, educational and physical well being. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport is therefore working very closely with colleagues in other Government departments including Education and Skills, Health, Home Office, Transport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister which have an interest in sport representatives from whom he meets every month.

Many of the current sports funding programmes are also targeted specifically at areas of social and sporting deprivation. These include the New Opportunities Fund Sport and PE in School programme, the Spaces for Sport and the Arts programme and Sport Action Zones.

Government funding for national governing bodies of sport is largely channelled through the sports councils. This funding supports a range of their activities including their sports development plans which will in many instances have an impact on areas such as social inclusion, physical well being and crime reduction.

Sustainable Procurement

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of

2 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 260–61W, on recycling, if she will make a statement on how her Department defines sustainable procurement. [79349]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport engages in procurement considering the effective protection of the environment and prudent use of natural resources. The whole life performance and cost are considered before purchase. This includes not only purchase price but the impact on the environment and cost of operation and the impact and cost of disposal. For example the latest office furniture purchased has full Forest Stewardship Certification supplied by a World Wildlife Fund approved company and will, at the end of it's useful life, be capable of 100 per cent. recycling.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what strategies her Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79298]

Dr. Howells: My Department is committed to equality of opportunity for all staff and has a policy not to discriminate on the grounds of age. All policies on recruitment, development, performance management and retention are continuously reviewed to ensure that there are no age barriers to employment.

Recruitment (over 50s)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of new recruits to her Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79311]

Dr. Howells: The percentage of new recruits to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport aged 50 or over in each of the last two years is shown below:

1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001–8.3 per cent.

1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002–5.3 per cent.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she intends to reply to the letter to her dated 15 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Tony Bowyer. [79447]

Dr. Howells: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to my right hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Broadcasting

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she is introducing to secure the future of *(a)* independent television broadcasters and *(b)* local programmes in Northern Ireland. [79429]

Dr. Howells: The Government are seeking to introduce a Communications Bill in the next Session that would include provisions intended to retain and strengthen the regional dimension to public service broadcasting. Under the new three tier structure for the regulation of broadcasting, OFCOM would have to agree targets with the public service broadcasters for regional (and where appropriate local) programming and/or regional productions. The Channel 3 service would continue to be licensed on a regional basis.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what role ITV will be required to play in sustaining local programming under the new ITV Charter for the Nations and Regions. [79430]

Dr. Howells: The Charter for Broadcasting in the Nations and Regions is an agreement between the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the ITV Companies. The Charter sets out levels of quality and investment for a diverse range of programmes designed to reflect life within the nations and regions. Through the Charter the ITV Companies aim to secure the quality and accessibility of national and regional programmes into the future.

Extreme Sports

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with stakeholders concerning regulating extreme sports. [79748]

Dr. Howells: The Department has not had any discussions with stakeholders concerning regulating extreme sports.

Olympic Games

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with interested parties on the practicalities of a London bid for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. [79826]

Dr. Howells: Officials from my Department have held regular meetings during this year with all the key stakeholders to discuss the implications of London bidding to host the 2012 Olympic Games. These stakeholders were the Greater London Authority, the British Olympic Association, UK Sport and Sport England. In addition all interested Government Departments have been involved in assessing the ARUP report on the Costs and Benefits of a 2012 London Olympic Bid.

My right hon. Friend, The Secretary of State has met the Mayor of London and will meet the British Olympic Association to discuss the practicalities of such a bid.

Football

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many football games Ministers in her Department have attended since 1 June 2001 in their official capacity; and where those games took place. [79734]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State attended a football match on the 21 of April 2002 between Norwich City and Stockport County and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport attended the following matches:

1–09–01—England vs Germany, Munich

5–09–01—England vs Albania, Newcastle

6–10–01—England vs Greece, Manchester

10–11–01—England vs Sweden, Aston Villa

5-12-01—West Ham United vs Aston Villa, Upton Park
6-03-02—Liverpool vs Newcastle, Liverpool
22-03-02—England vs Scotland U19's, Sheffield
27-03-02—England vs Italy, Leeds
2-06-02—England vs Sweden, Saitama, World Cup
7-06-02—England vs Argentina, Sapporo, World Cup
12-06-02—England vs Nigeria, Osaka, World Cup
16-10-02—England vs Macedonia, Southampton

Racist Incidents

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with *(a)* European colleagues, *(b)* the FA and *(c)* other interested parties regarding recent racist incidents involving British-based players in Europe in competitions. [79827]

Dr. Howells: Neither I nor my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have discussed with European colleagues, the FA or other interested parties the recent racist incidents involving British—based players in European in competitions. This is a matter for UEFA, who are reviewing the events.

However, the Government shares the revulsion which has been widely expressed following recent matches in Europe. The Government also supports the Europe-wide programme of anti-racism activities organised by Football Against Racism in Europe with the full support and involvement of the Kick it Out campaign.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to her from hon. Members in this session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79941]

Dr Howells: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Queen Alexandra Hospital Site

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what conditions on development were laid down by her Department when it gave the former Queen Alexandra hospital site in John Islip street, Westminster, to the Tate Gallery; and what the purpose was of such conditions with respect to development on the site for *(a)* residential housing and *(b)* commercial offices. [80336]

Dr Howells: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Special Advisers

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 648–9W, how many visits have been conducted by each parliamentary adviser appointed by her Department and to where; and what visits have been conducted by advisers appointed subsequent to 24 May. [79975]

Dr Howells: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

British Board of Film Classification

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the members of the British Board of Film Classification. [80225]

Dr Howells: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sport Grants

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will announce the level of grant to *(a)* Sport England and *(b)* UK Sport for financial year 2003–2004; and if she will make a statement. [80342]

Dr Howells: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what public consultations have been commenced by her Department in each month since 20 July; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80264]

Dr. Howells: One consultation has been commenced by the Department in this period. The Review of Lottery Funding consultation began on 29 July 2002 and ended on 30 October 2002. It can be found at www.culture.gov.uk.

Film Council

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps the Film Council is taking to increase the number of films that are *(a)* subtitled and *(b)* audio-described. [80339]

Dr. Howells: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Alcohol Licensing

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how she estimates the removal of licensing jurisdiction from the courts to the local authorities will contribute to the Government's aims to *(a)* reduce crime and the fear of crime and *(b)* increase public confidence. [78685]

Dr. Howells: The Government are confident that the proposed transfer of responsibility for alcohol licensing from licensing justices to local authorities will assist its efforts to reduce crime and the fear of crime. Since 1998 local authorities have had a leading statutory role in preventing local crime and disorder and the link between alcohol and crime is therefore a strong argument for them taking responsibility for alcohol licensing.

The transfer of responsibility should not however be considered in isolation. The Government's proposed Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Bill will also include a whole package of measures designed to reduce crime and the fear of crime. These will include providing the police with extended powers to close pubs, clubs and off-licences that create disorder. The Bill will strengthen the law on the sale of alcohol to under-18s and will give the police greater powers to confiscate alcohol in certain public areas. It will abolish the artificially early closing times that are the source of much of the trouble on our streets at night and there will be enhanced police powers to confiscate alcohol. Local residents will also be able to object to any premises licence application, or request a review of a licence that has been granted, if they have concerns about that licence in relation to crime.

Health and Safety

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans she has to assess the safety practices of bungee jumping. [79747]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

Health and safety law applies to bungee jumping activities. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, the Lifting Operations Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 are of direct relevance.

The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) and the industry have assessed health and safety in this activity and have issued guidance.

As a result of a recent fatal accident the Health and Safety Commission and Health and Safety Executive will review the safety practices in the light of findings of the continuing investigation.

Responsibility for enforcement of health and safety law in respect of bungee jumping activities falls to the relevant authority.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

GM Organisms

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what is her Department's position on acceptable thresholds for the adventitious presence of genetically modified organisms in seed batches of *(a)* oil seed rape, *(b)* tomatoes, *(c)* beet, *(d)* cotton, *(e)* chicory, *(f)* maize, *(g)* potatoes and *(h)* soya beans; and if she will make a statement. [75244]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 October 2002]:* The EU Commission has proposed the following thresholds for the adventitious presence of approved GM seeds in non-GM seeds:

0.3 per cent. for swede rape

0.5 per cent. for tomato, beet, chicory, maize, cotton and potato

0.7 per cent. for soya bean

The Government is giving careful consideration to our position on these proposals. In so doing, we shall aim to preserve consumer choice by seeking adequate protection for the integrity of non-GM seeds.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will set out her policy towards draft EU proposals for new seed regulations. [75243]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 October 2002]:* The Government is giving careful consideration to the EU Commission's proposals on thresholds for the adventitious presence of approved GM seeds in non-GM seeds. In so doing, we shall aim to preserve consumer choice by seeking adequate protection for the integrity of non-GM seeds.

Organic Standards

Mr. Breed: to ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her Answers on 29 October (76252, 76253 and 76254), if she will place the correspondence to and from her Department and the United States Department of Agriculture and organic certifiers relating to UK organic standards and the US National Organic Plan in the Library. [79116]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* I have today placed in the Library the following correspondence between the Department and the US Department of Agriculture—

A letter dated 4 December 2001 from James Hughes, First Secretary (Agriculture and Trade Policy) at the British Embassy in Washington, to Mr. A J Yates acting Administrator of the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service formally applying for recognition of the UK's approved certifiers of organic food. (The documents enclosed with this letter can be found on the Departments website at http://defraweb/farm/organic/default.htm)

A letter dated 8 January 2002 from the Richard H Mathews, Programme Manager for the National Organic Programme, acknowledging Mr. Hughes' letter,

A letter dated 21 October 2002 from Mr. Yates to Alex Dasi-Sutton acting Secretary of UKROFS confirming that the USDA has determined the UKROFS' procedures for approving organic inspection bodies to be sufficient to secure conformity with the NOP.

We are discussing with the UK organic inspection bodies how best to deal with the conditions set out in Mr. Yates letter of 21 October and will be sending a substantive reply to this letter shortly.

I have also placed in the Library letters dated 5 September and 25 September 2002 to UK importers of organic produce and UK inspection bodies confirming that sufficient assurances had been received from the principal inspection bodies in the US to enable authorisation to import produce certified by those bodies to remain in place.

Illegal Food Imports

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many non-statutory inspections were carried out for illegal food imports in each of the last 10 years, broken down by category. [78615]

Mr. Morley: Control of imports of products of animal origin is the responsibility of Local/Port Health Authorities. Information on the number of inspections carried out is not held centrally. During the course of checks for other products (including drugs and money), illegal food imports may also be found. Since 1 April 2001, 3899 seizures of animal products have been reported to Defra).

Animal Welfare

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will support the European Commission's proposal that financial assistance should be given to farmers to help them adopt higher animal welfare systems. [77687]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* As a European leader in the animal welfare field, the UK supports the principle of encouraging adoption of higher welfare standards through financial assistance. However, we will need to be careful that any system adopted is workable and fair, and that it is compatible with World Trade Organisation rules.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will support the European Commission's proposal to link the payment of Common Agricultural Policy subsidies to farmers with their compliance with animal welfare laws; and if she will make a statement. [77688]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* The Government supports the principle of the European Commission's proposal to decouple support from production and create a single income payment linked to compliance with animal welfare, environment and food and occupational safety standards. There has only been limited discussion on this aspect of the proposals so far and more clarification is needed, as the details will be important to the effectiveness of this proposal.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a statement on the welfare of milking cows. [80040]

Mr. Morley: There is legislation in place to protect the welfare of dairy cows. The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2000 sets down general welfare requirements for all farmed animals, including some detailed requirements for cattle. There is also a specific welfare code on cattle. This is currently being updated and the revised code will include a separate section devoted to the welfare of dairy cattle.

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many *(a)* live sheep and *(b)* live pigs have been exported from the United Kingdom to date in 2002 for (i) slaughter, (ii) further fattening and (iii) breeding; and how many *(A)* sheep and *(B)* pigs in each of these categories were exported to each individual country of destination. [77508]

Mr. Morley: The total number of live sheep and live pigs certified for export from the United Kingdom between 1 January 2002 and 1 November 2002 for slaughter, fattening and breeding are shown in the following tables.

Country of destination	*Live Sheep Slaughter*	*Fattening*	*Breeding*
Austria	0	0	22
Belgium	0	0	4
France	49,476	3,040	158
Germany	4,129	0	5
Isle of Man	0	0	11
Italy	29,244	0	0
Netherlands	456	0	55
Republic of Ireland	166,865	385	92
Totals	250,170	3,425	347

Country of destination	*Live Pigs Slaughter*	*Fattening*	*Breeding*
Belgium	0	0	3,888
Denmark	0	0	47
France	0	0	47
Germany	0	0	3,628
Greece	0	0	171
Isle of Man	0	0	71
Italy	0	0	1,194
Netherlands	0	0	9,038
Philippines	0	0	75
Poland	0	0	701
Spain	0	0	1,607
Republic of Ireland	20,951	0	22
Totals	20,951	0	20,489

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on *(a)* 17 October, *(b)* 18 October, *(c)* 20 October and *(d)* 24 October; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey (i) during inspection for health certification purposes and (ii) at Dover docks, and to where those sheep were taken; and what the address was of the final destination on the route plan for each of the consignments; [78620]

(2) how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on the *(a)* Alda-K, and *(b)* Caroline to Continental Europe on the 29 October; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey (i) during inspection for health certification purposes and (ii) at Dover docks, and to where those sheep were taken; and what the address was of the final destination on the route plan for each of the consignments. [79005]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is as follows:

Date	Total animals	Where consignments were certified	Animals rejected at certification	Animals rejected at Dover docks	Destination
17–10	3000	England, Scotland and Wales	20	0	France
18–10	3575	Wales	37	0	France and Holland
20–10	2675	England and Wales	80	0	Italy and France
24–10	2515	England and Wales	19	0	Italy and France
29–10 Alda-K	2666	England and Wales	22	0	Italy, Belgium, Germany and France
29–10 Caroline	2621	England and Wales	32	0	Italy and France

The sheep for the consignments listed above were certified within 48 hours prior to export. These consignments, apart from the sailing on 17 October which were fattening animals transported to a single holding, went to approved slaughterhouses. The animals which were rejected at certification remained in Great Britain.

Home Energy Conservation Bill

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what representation her Department has received from local authorities *(a)* prior to and *(b)* following the withdrawal of the Home Energy Conservation Bill; and if she will list these local authorities. [77403]

Mr. Meacher: We have received representations from Local Authorities regarding various aspects of the Home Energy Conservation Bill. They were all received prior to the Bill's withdrawal.

The following Local Authorities have expressed general support for the Bill;

Acaster Malbis Parish Council
Adlington Town Council
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Bath and North East Somerset Council
Bedfordshire County Council
Berwick upon Tweed Borough Council
Bottesford Town Council
Broadland District Council
Carrickfergus Borough Council
Castle Morpeth Borough Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Cinderford Town Council
City of Manchester
City of Sunderland Council
Clitheroe Town Council
Copeland Borough Council
Cumbria County Council
Cyngor Tref Nefyn Town Council
Derbyshire County Council
Dover District Council
Dyseth Community Council
Easington District Council
East Cambridgeshire District Council
East Hampshire District Council
East Riding Council
Ellesemere Town Council
Exeter City Council
Harmby Parish Council
Havant Borough Council
Heath Charnock Parish Council
Heighington Parish Council
Hemsworth and District Borough Council
Isle of Anglesey County Council
King's Lynn and West Norfolk
Kingston upon Thames Council
Lewes District Council
Macclesfield
Market Rasen Town Council
Newcastle City Council
North Devon District Council
Northampton Borough Council
North Lincolnshire Council
North Shropshire District Council
North West Leicestershire District Council
North Wiltshire District Council
Norwich City Council
Nottinghamshire County Council
Oswestry Rural Parish Council
Oxford City Council
Pendle Borough Council
Pentir Community Council
Penzance Town Council
Pilning and Severn Beach Parish Council
Powys County Council
Radyr and Morganstown Community Council
Rudgwick Parish Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Shropshire County Council
South Gloucestershire Council
St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
Stoke Gifford Parish Council
Stoke Holy Cross Parish Council
Swindon Borough Council
Trawsfynydd Community Council
Tynedale Council
Wellingborough Borough Council
West Lindsey District Council
Weymouth and Portland Borough Council
Woking Borough Council

The following Local Authorities have expressed support for the Bill "in principle";

Castle Point Borough Council
Swindon Borough Council

The following Local Authorities have expressed support for the Bill, provided that extra funding is provided;

Ashford Borough Council
Bedford Borough Council
Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Bromsgrove District Council
District of Easington
Lewes District Council
London Borough of Havering
Rochford District Council

Tewkesbury Borough Council

The following local authorities have requested that statutory targets be included in the Bill;
Daventry District Council
Derbyshire County Council
Hyndburn Borough Council
Northamptonshire County Council
Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
Oldham Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Preston Borough Council

The following local authorities have expressed support for the clauses of the Bill that relate to Fuel Poverty;
Brighton and Hove Council
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Rural Funding

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many funding commitments were launched by her Department and across the Government following the publication of the Rural White Paper in November 2000, stating which *(a)* require bidding and *(b)* are linked to a set funding formula; and what total amount is available for each commitment. [79908]

Alun Michael: There are 260 key commitments contained or referred to in the Rural White Paper, of which 29 have direct funding arrangements. The figures are set out in the table below. Further information on the progress of these schemes is available in our Rural White Paper implementation plan on www.defra.gov.uk

Funding Commitment	*Bidding*	*Set Funding Formula*	*Total*
Community Service Fund*	✓		£15m over 3 years
Refurbishing Post Offices	✓		£2m
Single Small Schools Fund		✓	£240m over 3 years
One stop primary care centres		✓	£100m
Sure Start	✓		£22m
Social Exclusion Projects		✓	£4.5
Police Visibility in rural areas		✓	£60m
Housing Corporation programme of affordable housing in settlements under 3000		✓	Figures currently being collated
Starter Homes Initiative		✓	£250m
Rural Housing Enablers*	✓		£2.8m
Promote flexible lettings policies by Local Authorities		✓	£13m
Rural Transport Partnership*	✓		19.5m
Parish Transport Fund*	✓		£15m
Rural Bus Subsidy		✓	£132m
Rural Bus Challenge	✓		£20m
Community Rail Partnerships*	✓		£0.2m
Rail Passenger Partnership	✓		£52m
Regeneration of 100 market towns*		✓	£37m
Leader + *	✓		£50m
Business clusters		✓	£54m
Help for small/ medium sized abattoirs*		✓	£20m
School Milk Scheme		✓	£1.5m
National School Fruit Scheme		✓	£42m
Extension of Redundant Buildings Grant scheme	✓		£4m
Local Heritage Initiative	✓		£5m
National Parks Grants*		✓	£31.5m (2002–03)
Increased funding for AONBs*		✓	£1.1m (2002–03)
National training strategy/ best practice toolkit for Parish and Town Councils*		✓	£2m
Help 1000 rural communities prepare plans*	✓		£5m

Notes:
* Programmes administered by Defra or one of its agencies
The European Rural Development Programme is an important component in the delivery of the policies set out in the Rural White Paper. This programme commits £1.6 billion in funding over 7 years.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many illegal meat imports were identified by Customs and Excise entering the UK in each of the last 10 years, broken down by category and where they were discovered. [78656]

Mr. Morley: The records held by Defra on the seizure of illegal food imports date back to 1 April 2001. Prior to that date, information on seizures was not held centrally.

Since 1 April 2001, HM Customs and Excise have reported a total of 2147 seizures to Defra. Of those, there have been 1473 seizures of meat, 269 of fish, 58 of dairy products, 330 multiple seizures in which more than one type of produce of animal origin was found and 17 other seizures (which included products such as honey).

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which of the notifiable diseases mentioned in Schedule 2A of the Government's Animal Health Bill 2001 she estimates are able to enter the country by illegally imported bushmeat. [75933]

Mr. Morley: There is no precise definition of the term bushmeat, but this is generally understood to mean the meat of wild animals hunted for food, derived mainly from Central and West African countries.

As part of our Action Plan on illegal imports, we are carrying out a risk assessment to provide information on the likelihood that infected meat will enter the country undetected and infect susceptible livestock. This risk assessment is nearing completion. The risk assessment is focussing initially on the risk posed by Foot and Mouth Disease, though further work will follow on the swine diseases (Classical and African swine fever, swine vesicular disease). It would be possible to use the risk assessment model for other diseases as listed in Schedule 2A, where necessary and appropriate.

Of the diseases listed in Schedule 2A of the Animal Health Bill, Bluetongue and African horse sickness are not transmissible through meat/meat products (they are insect-borne). Other diseases are transmissible via meat, although the risks vary considerably. Generally, the viruses and bacteria present will depend on the species of meat, handling following slaughter, the processing it has undergone (for example, viruses are unlikely to survive the drying or smoking process), whether the product is on the bone, or has large quantities of offal, the temperature at which it has been kept and the length

of time taken to reach the UK. The risk of infected bushmeat coming into contact with susceptible livestock is another important variable.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many prosecutions there have been since January 2000 of persons found to be selling illegally imported meat products. [75929]

Mr. Morley: Responsibility for enforcing the law on imported meat products at the point of sale lies with local authorities. Information on prosecutions is not held centrally.

Defra is aware that in 2001, HM Customs and Excise prosecuted three people for offences relating to the import of meat covered by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Two were convicted on CITES offences and one was acquitted, but convicted under a separate Animal Health charge. This year, we are aware of one successful prosecution brought by Crawley Borough Council in July, and six cautions issued by the London Port Health Authority in October. All related to the illegal importation of animal products.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many extra staff have been appointed to detect illegally imported meat at ports of entry to the UK since the outbreak of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [79283]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* An additional £1.5 million has been allocated in this financial year to fund extra checks. Discussions have been held with Local/Port Health Authorities on how best to target the resources. We expect to be able to fund between 18 and 30 extra officers this year. Sixteen officers have already started work or are just about to.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 585W, on illegal meat imports, what progress has been made towards implementing the action plan; and if she will make a statement. [79554]

Mr. Morley: Since April, significant progress to implement the action plan has been made:

The risk assessment to provide information on the likelihood that infected meat will enter the country undetected, and infect susceptible livestock will be published later this year.

We have increased the number of targeted checks carried out this year, especially on passenger bags.

An extra £1.5 million has been allocated in this financial year for additional enforcement officers to perform checks on imports at selected ports and airports.

At European level, new rules on personal import allowances were adopted on 20 September and come in to force on 1 January 2003.

A six-month pilot using detector dogs to find illegal animal products in passenger baggage and freight commenced at Heathrow on 16 September.

The "Don't bring back more than you bargained for" public awareness campaign, launched on 8 July. Two video fillers are currently being distributed, and we have already produced and distributed a radio filler, posters and leaflets.

Biosecurity

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; if she will list the biosecurity measures, introduced by the Government at UK air and seaports since the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak. [77541]

Mr. Morley: Biosecurity measures are in place at various points in the production chain. For example, leaflets giving advice on biosecurity have been issued to farmers. Due to the increased numbers of animals being imported to replace livestock, surveillance for certain diseases, (for example brucellosis) has been enhanced. The Government has introduced new biosecurity requirements for premises assembling live animals for intra-Community trade. These are in addition to the EU animal health rules covering assembly centres.

The Government's Action Plan on Illegal Imports, published on 28 March set out measures to reduce the risk of animal and plant diseases entering the country. Since publication of the Plan, a number of measures have been put into place specifically at air and seaports. On 22 May, enforcement officers were given additional powers to search commercial consignments and personal baggage for illegal imports. We have increased the number and improved the locations of posters explaining our import controls at the major UK airports. On 19 September, a six month pilot using detector dogs began at Heathrow. In this financial year, an extra £1.5 million has been allocated for checks to be conducted by additional enforcement officers at certain ports and airports. A risk assessment was commissioned to ascertain the amount of illegal imports, the risk that they are infected with a major animal disease, and the probability that the disease could enter the food chain, infecting our livestock and wildlife. The results of this risk assessment are due later this autumn and will help us determine the extent of the problem and the appropriate level of response.

Forest Stewardship Council

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much funding the Government has allocated to the Forest Stewardship Council in each year since 1997. [77582]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* We have not allocated any funding to the Forest Stewardship Council.

Electrical Appliances

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what research has been conducted by her Department on assessing the role of consumer choice in product purchase and its impact on energy efficiency and total energy demand from domestic electrical appliances. [77594]

Mr. Meacher: The Department's Market Transformation Programme (MTP), working with the Energy Saving Trust, the Carbon Trust, manufacturers, retailers and other experts, carries out or acquires market research and analysis to help develop measures for reducing the total energy consumed by domestic appliances and other equipment. MTP currently maintains detailed consultative Policy Briefs accounting

for around 90 per cent. of domestic energy consumption with baselines and projections to 2010 and beyond. All this information is open to scrutiny and review on the programme web-site (www.mtprog.com)

The role of consumer choice and reliable consumer environmental product information is a central consideration in constructing effective action programmes. The approach is to achieve better choice of efficient products by stimulating innovation and competition (for example, by mandatory EU "A to G" energy rating labels); encouraging market take-up of the best available products (for example, by the "Energy Efficiency Recommended" endorsement scheme and the Energy Efficiency Commitment); and discouraging the poorest performing equipment, by regulation or by voluntary agreements with industry.

Our analysis shows that this approach has been very successful in increasing consumer choice of efficient products and in raising overall efficiency levels. For example, in 1995 the most efficient fridges and freezers generally available to UK consumers would have been rated "B", with nearly half of UK consumers choosing the least efficient categories "D, E and F". Today, the range of choice is within a much higher band of energy performance: the most efficient products actually exceeding the "A" rating and only a very few available below a "C" rating.

Antibiotics

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment she has made of the extent of antibiotic use in agriculture, and if she will make a statement. [79699]

Mr. Morley: The Government take the emergence of antibiotic resistance in bacteria very seriously and is developing policies to minimise unnecessary use of antibiotics in controlling animal diseases.

One of the key planks of the Government's strategy to reduce the amount of antibiotics used on farm is to encourage the prudent use of all medicines. The Government actively supports the activities of the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) alliance in helping to promote this message.

Government policy on this issue is informed by the advice of its specialist advisory committees. My Department funds a research programme with a principle aim of reducing the use of antibiotics by developing alternative approaches to animal disease control.

The Government also monitor annually the sale of antibiotics for use in animals in the UK. In February 2002 the Government published the latest of its annual reports for sales of antimicrobial products used as veterinary medicines, growth promoters and coccidiostats. The report showed that 437 tonnes of active ingredient of therapeutic antimicrobials were sold for food producing animals in 2000. This slight increase over the previous period is believed to be due in the main to the EU ban of some antimicrobial growth promoters in June 1999, which resulted in a rise in clinical infections in animals that required treatment. There has also been an increased need to treat secondary infections in pigs suffering from two new diseases in the pig industry (Post-weaning Multi-system Wasting Syndrome (PMWS) or Porcine Dermatitis and Nephritis Syndrome (PDNS) that are having a significant impact on our domestic pig herds. Despite the increase, sales for 2000 remain amongst the lowest of the eight years for which sales data are available.

No antibiotic products are used in horticulture in the UK.

The report is available in the House library.

African Exports

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the price was at 1st October of one kilo of *(a)* unprocessed cocoa Beans, *(b)* unprocessed coffee beans, *(c)* unprocessed sugar cane, *(d)* processed cocoa products containing more than 31 per cent. cocoa solids, *(e)* roasted ground coffee and *(f)* refined white sugar from (i) Kenya and (ii) Uganda; and what percentage of this price was an imposed tarif. [79608]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* Overseas Trade Statistics show that, of the commodities listed, only *(b)* unprocessed coffee beans have recently been imported into the UK from Kenya and Uganda. The price of one kilo of unprocessed coffee beans from Kenya is £1.37 and from Uganda £0.67. These prices are based on the value and volume of imports in August, the latest month for which information is available, and represent the price at the point of entry to the UK. There is no imposed tariff on these imports.

Environment Council

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what was the outcome of the Environment Council on 17 October; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [76395]

Margaret Beckett: I represented the UK at Environment Council on 17 October, accompanied by Mr. Ross Finnie, the Scottish Executive Minister for Environment and Rural Development. This was the first Environment Council of the Danish Presidency. It was also the first to be held under the Council's new rules of procedure, which provide that final debates and votes on legislative proposals subject to co-decision with the European Parliament are held in public. The Council reached political agreement on 3 proposals and made progress on a range of other important issues.

The Council reached political agreement on a Common Position on the revision of the EC Directive on packaging and packaging waste, which was along the lines of the general approach adopted at June Council. I strongly supported this proposal, which sets targets for recovery and recycling that the UK will find challenging, but achievable. These include a minimum 60 per cent. recovery target and recycling targets between 55–70 per cent., with a 2008 deadline for implementation. The only opposition was from Belgium and the Netherlands, who would have preferred even more demanding targets.

Political agreement was reached on the "Seveso II" Directive, which I also supported. This modifies the existing Directive on the prevention and control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances. It introduces new controls on hazardous sites across the EU. Obligations will be placed on industrial operators to put into effect Safety Management Systems and detailed risk assessments, as well as to provide information to the public.

Political agreement was also reached on a Regulation to complete implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in relation to transboundary movements of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) from the Community. Along with the Commission, I argued that the Regulation should be as closely consistent with the Protocol as possible. After lengthy negotiations we secured significant improvements to the text, namely that the form of identification of GMOs in mixed bulk shipments should be consistent with other EC legislation, including existing legislation on the release of GMOs and the forthcoming proposed Regulation on traceability and labelling. Furthermore, express consent from the importer will be required for the first international transboundary movement of GM material. On the basis of the improved text I was able to support the political agreement.

There was a short discussion on the proposed Regulation on traceability and labelling of GMOs in products. This focussed on links with a proposal to cover GMOs in food and feed, which had been discussed at Agriculture Council earlier in the same week. There is still some way to go before Member States can reach political agreement, and Council requested that the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper) continue to work on this dossier.

There was an orientation debate concerning the proposed directive on emissions trading, with a view to being in a position to seek political agreement at the December Council. I strongly supported the scheme but pressed for flexibility during the first period, in order to allow it to interact more easily with national schemes, such as the UK's successful existing regime, and allow inclusion of other sectors and gases.

Council adopted conclusions on the implementation of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. This included follow-up to environment-related commitments from the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. It called for a strengthening of the Cardiff process of integrating environmental considerations into EU business, and adopted a set of environment-related indicators which it recommended for inclusion in the Commission's report to the Spring European Council. The Conclusions include reference to the need, also accepted by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on the 15 October, to take account of EU commitments made at the WTO meeting in Doha and at Johannesburg in considering the future of the Common Agriculture Policy and Common Fisheries Policy.

Council Conclusions on climate change were adopted, without discussion, defining the EU's negotiating position for the 8 Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Climate Change in New Delhi. The Conclusions call for all Annex 1 developed countries which accepted the comprehensive and balanced Kyoto agreement reached in Bonn and Marrakech last year to ratify the Kyoto Protocol as soon as possible so as to achieve its entry into force in the near future. Developed countries which do not intend to ratify are urged to meet their responsibilities under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and to return their emissions to 1990 levels. The Conclusions also recall the ultimate objective of the Convention—to achieve stabilisation of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere at a safe level and call upon all states to engage in a dialogue with a view to initiating at the 8 Conference of the Parties a process for further action under the Convention and the Protocol.

We were able to support the negotiating mandate for the EC for the 12 Conference of the Parties to CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) and were pleased to see it agreed without amendment. There was unanimous support for the UK's proposal to list the Basking Shark in Appendix II, and unanimous agreement to oppose the Japanese proposal to downlist two species of whales (Minke and Bryde's whales), which would effectively reopen trade in the species.

The Council took note of progress on the proposed Environmental Liability Directive. The Presidency indicated that political agreement would not be possible at the December Council, as the European Parliament's first reading is not expected until spring 2003. The Presidency updated Council on the proposed Regulation on the monitoring of forests (Forest Focus) which aims to establish a Community scheme to assess forest ecosystem conditions. The Presidency also updated Council on two inter-related proposals, a Regulation and a Council Decision, to implement the Rotterdam Convention on a Prior Informed Consent procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade. On the Regulation, a compromise package has been approved in Coreper and has been forwarded to the European Parliament.

Under any other business, the Commission presented a report on mercury from the Chlor-Alkali industry, which followed a request from the Council in June 2001 to clarify the legal situation. The Greek delegation presented the outcome of the Euro-Med conference that took place in Athens on 10 July 2002. The German delegation made a statement on the financing of the European Committee for Standardisation Environmental Helpdesk. The French delegation started an exchange of views on possible European action in the field of flood prevention. In relation to this the Commission informed Council that a Communication on an integrated strategy on prevention, preparation and response to natural and technological risks is under preparation. Austria and Ireland made a joint statement on nuclear power in the context of sustainable development. Finally, the Danish delegation presented the results of a meeting of EU nature and forest Directors, which took place in Vigso, Denmark on 2–4 October 2002.

Local Agenda 21

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what

information on the work of Local Agenda 21 groups is received in her Department; and what efforts are made to consolidate their views [79635]

Mr. Meacher: The Government monitored progress on Local Agenda 21 (LA21) until the end of 2000. By then over 93 per cent. of local authorities in England and Wales had LA21 strategies in place. There had also been a number of studies into LA21 in the UK. The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to prepare community strategies for promoting the economic, social and environmental well being of their communities and contributing to sustainable development in the UK. The Government's statutory guidance says that authorities should build on the experience of partnership working and community engagement gained through LA21. The Government does not require authorities to submit their community strategies. However, there is a Best Value Performance Indicator which monitors authorities' timetable for preparing community strategies whilst checking that they adhere to the key aims and components set out in the guidance.

Game Birds

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a statement on the availability of Emtryl to the UK game bird rearers. [80254]

Mr. Morley: At the request of the holder of the marketing authorisations, the marketing authorisations for Emtryl premix for game birds, Emtryl pure for game birds and Emtryl soluble for game birds were suspended with effect from 22 October 2002. However, those products already supplied to the market may continue to be sold or administered to animals in accordance with the terms of the marketing authorisation until the expiry date of the product.

Haskins Review

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the terms are of the recently announced inquiry to be headed by Lord Haskins relating to her Department. [78583]

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what are the objectives, terms of reference and timescale of Lord Haskin's review of her Department and its agencies. [78911]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Lord Haskin has agreed, at my request, to review delivery arrangements and structures to Defra's countryside responsibilities. Lord Haskins will consult widely with Defra stakeholders and those who deliver rural policy. We expect the review to be completed by the summer of 2003.

Agency Budgets

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the budget is for the *(a)* Countryside Agency, *(b)* Environment Agency, *(c)* Central Science Laboratory, *(d)* Veterinary Laboratories Agency, *(e)* Veterinary Medicines Directorate and *(f)* English Nature in 2002–03; and if she will make a statement on the future projections for the budget of each of these bodies. [79729]

Alun Michael: The requested budget figures are as follows:

£'000s	2002–03 Resource	2002–03 Capital
Countryside Agency	92,050	1,000
Environment Agency	168,000	17,000
Central Science Laboratory*	38,509	1,425
Veterinary Laboratories Agency*	75,460	28,219
Veterinary Medicines Directorate*	10,529	285
English Nature	58,506	3,325

The above amounts score within Departmental Expenditure Limits, and exclude overheads for central services provided by the core department. They are subject to in year review and adjustment.

The three Executive Agencies (*) operate on a net administration costs basis, whereby gross costs are matched by income, and have full cost recovery targets. To make their budgets more meaningful the offsetting income has been excluded from the above table.

The NDPBs—Countryside Agency, Environment Agency, and English Nature—resource and capital allocations for 2003–04 will be finalised shortly. Those for the executive agencies are still under review and will be confirmed as part of the Business Planning process.

Pigswill

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what proportion of responses received to the pigswill consultation were in favour of *(a)* tightening controls, *(b)* maintaining current levels of control and *(c)* relaxing controls; [78542]

(2) what steps her Department has taken to revise the published consultation response on the practice of using pigswill; [78552]

(3) how many responses she has received on the pigswill consultation from *(a)* operatives who provide a pigswill service and *(b)* owners of pig-rearing farms; [78533]

(4) what proportion of responses received to the pigswill consultation were in favour of *(a)* continuing current pigswill arrangements *(b)* altering current arrangements and regulations and *(c)* a ban on the use of pigswill. [78541]

Mr. Morley: The final number of responses received by the Government in reply to the public consultation letter of 27 March 2001 on the proposal to ban swill feeding reached 351. Of those a minority objected to the proposed ban. To review all those responses again for the details requested would involve my Department in disproportionate costs.

A letter was sent on 9 May 2001 to all those that were consulted to advise on the decision that had been reached and to provide advice for producers who were feeding swill at that time. The advice was re-issued 2 days later to clarify certain paragraphs and to delete some of the advice on the disposal of unprocessed swill which was incorrect.

Milk

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1), whether the subsidy from the European Union aims to provide free school milk for children aged up to *(a)* seven and *(b)* 11; [79225]

(2) if she will make a statement on the European subsidy to provide milk for all school children up the the age of 11; and how many education authorities in the UK take advantage of the European Union subsidy to provide school milk. [79223]

Mr. Morley: The EU subsidy is intended to encourage the consumption of milk by children by reducing the cost of its provision in schools. In the UK it may be claimed by those education authorities which choose to provide children up to the age of 11 with milk. In the UK there were, in the 2000–01 school year, 208 such claimants.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1), what measures she has taken to encourage supermarket chains to increase the purchase of milk from dairy farmers; [79229]

(2) what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* dairy farmers and *(b)* representatives from supermarket chains regarding the price of milk; [79228]

(3) if she will make a statement on the decision by supermarket chains to increase the purchase price of milk from farmers by 2 pence a litre. [79227]

Mr. Morley: The prices charged by retailers, or those negotiated between farmers and purchasers, or between processors and retailers, are private commercial matters. Defra Ministers cannot and have not sought to get involved in price negotiations with farmers, retailers or processors, although the market situation in the diary sector is naturally an issue that does arise during discussions. Meetings of an informal dairy supply chain group, chaired by my noble friend Lord Whitty, have addressed the issue of supply volatility and its effect on farmgate milk prices and, at its last meeting in September, representatives from different parts of the supply chain reported their views on the recently announced price increases. The Governments welcomes any action that will assist the long term sustainability of the dairy sector.

Parrett Project

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, where the Chairman of the Parrett catchment project has visited overseas on official business in the last two years. [78749]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett Catchment Project is an independent body. I am advised that the Chairman visited the Ruhr Valley in Germany in October 2002 in order to attend the initial meeting of the International Steering Committee of the JAF Intereg 111b project.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, what theChairman of the Parrett catchment project has been paid in out-of-pocket expenses over the last two years. [78750]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett Catchment Project is an independent body. I am advised that up to July 2002, the Chairman has claimed second class train fares, mileage and subsistence. These claims were made at standard County Council rates up to June 2001, and thereafter at Environment Agency rates, for meetings attended on Parrett Catchment Project business. Claims for the period since July 2002 have not yet been made.

Heathrow

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, when she expects *(a)* the new DEFRA inspection team and *(b)* the sniffer dogs to be deployed at Heathrow. [79175]

Margaret Beckett: A new Local/Port Health Authority team to undertake additional checks for illegal imports, funded by Defra, is due to start work at Heathrow on 12 November. The detector dog pilot started at Heathrow on 16 September.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Liddington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many claims for payment under *(a)* the beef special premium scheme 2001 and *(b)* the suckler cow premium scheme 2001 have been refused by the Rural Payments Agency; if she will publish an analysis of the reasons for such refusals; and if she will make a statement. [77324]

Margaret Beckett: *(a)* 3544 claims for payment under the beef special premium scheme 2001 have been refused entirely, 7203 claims for payment have been partly refused for payment under the beef special premium scheme 2001.

(b) 851 claims for payment under the suckler cow premium scheme 2001 have been refused entirely, 7659 claims for payment have been partly refused for payment under the suckler cow premium scheme 2001.

The above claims contain animals whose eligibility could not be established under the Commission Regulations, which govern the bovine schemes. The RPA regrets the delays and the impact on farmer's cash flow, but cannot ignore the discrepancies discovered through cross-checks, or indeed any other verification method employed by the Agency. Failure to act on the findings identified will result in significant disallowance.

The Commission have indicated that all cross-checks should be carried out prior to payment as they view these checks as a key control to the fund. If RPA were found to be making unsafe payments it would inevitably face disallowance.

When applicants disagree with the refusal decision it is open to them to provide the RPA with additional information, which they feel, should be taken into account.

Dairy Products

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimates she has made of consumption of *(a)* dairy products and *(b)* milk in each nation of the UK in each of the last 10 years. [79753]

Mr. Morley: The table shows consumption of selected dairy products in households as recorded by the National Food Survey between 1991 and 2000. It excludes food eaten outside the home and dairy produce used in processed food, e.g. pizzas.

The National Food Survey collects details of food purchases from a sample of households. Some of the variation seen for individual years within the table will therefore be due to sampling error.

UK household consumption of dairy products by country 1991–2000

Dairy products consumed in liquid form (a)	*Units*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
		Units: units as stated per person per week									
Drinking milk											
England	ml	1878	1969	1963	1967	1952	1870	1855	1829	1774	1825
Wales	ml	2171	2150	1968	2094	1967	1931	2078	1912	1834	1915
Scotland	ml	2029	2051	1877	1931	1918	1992	2001	1762	1806	1900
Northern Ireland	ml	na	na	na	na	na	1948	2158	2119	2130	2113
Other milks and dairy desserts											
England	ml	30	31	37	39	40	40	41	45	53	57
Wales	ml	17	28	35	28	24	37	50	47	28	73
Scotland	ml	37	35	32	28	23	20	32	28	51	51
Northern Ireland	ml	na	na	na	na	na	34	41	52	47	61
Cream											
England	ml	17	18	18	17	15	18	16	17	16	18
Wales	ml	16	14	19	15	9	19	13	17	14	12
Scotland	ml	18	20	17	13	10	14	15	17	15	15
Northern Ireland	ml	na	na	na	na	na	11	8	9	9	8
Cheese											
England	g	111	105	102	98	100	101	99	95	95	99
Wales	g	96	96	94	84	101	94	94	94	75	101
Scotland	g	87	97	86	84	84	91	90	90	97	89
Northern Ireland	g	na	na	na	na	na	57	65	55	57	60
Butter											
England	g	44	41	38	39	36	39	38	37	38	38
Wales	g	46	37	47	47	41	43	40	58	39	40
Scotland	g	41	45	51	39	41	41	37	37	31	44
Northern Ireland	g	na	na	na	na	na	86	64	59	62	68
Yoghurt and Fromage Frais											
England	ml	111	123	124	124	129	128	130	125	134	143
Wales	ml	83	101	108	92	115	123	112	142	93	133
Scotland	ml	110	118	100	105	115	127	124	119	119	123
Northern Ireland	ml	na	na	na	na	na	117	109	105	108	120
Condensed Milk											
England	ml	28	28	25	23	23	23	18	16	18	19
Wales	ml	51	19	28	20	23	15	23	29	9	37
Scotland	ml	17	20	14	15	21	14	9	10	15	12
Northern Ireland	ml	na	na	na	na	na	5	2	3	1	5

Source:
National Food Survey

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many animals there were in each dairy herd in each nation of the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years.
[79750]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA is able to provide data for England only. Figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for the devolved authorities.

Number of Dairy Cattle in the National Herd—England 1991–2002

1991	1937661
1992	1872685
1993	1862766
1994	1898369
1995	1810700
1996	1784745
1997	1701668
1998	1659649
1999	1660628
2000	1575484
2001	1490227
2002 (provisional)	1465020

Note:

1. A dairy cow is defined as a cow or heifer in the dairy herd that has calved.

Source:

June Agricultural and Horticultural Census

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what milk yields were; what percentage milk represented of final agricultural product; and what average milk prices were, for each nation of the UK in each of the last 10 years. [79752]

Mr. Morley: The available data are shown in the following tables:

Table 1. UK estimated average milk yield by country

Units: litres per cow

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
England & Wales	5264	5275	5292	5515	5652	5841	5887	6046	6114	6509
Scotland	5068	5177	5264	5518	5739	5671	5669	5390	5565	6240
Northern Ireland	4904	4958	5119	5346	5353	5503	5461	5650	5966	6273
United Kingdom	5211	5235	5273	5497	5627	5788	5818	5942	6047	6453

Notes:
Data are quoted in milk quota years which runs from April to March.
Data for Wales are not available separately.
Source:
Defra

Table 2. Milk as a percentage of UK agricultural production by country (a)

	1992 %	*1993* %	*1994* %	*1995* %	*1996* %	*1997* %	*1998* %	*1999* %	*2000* %	*2001(p)* %
England	na	na	na	13	14	14	13	13	12	14
Wales	na	na	na	30	30	28	29	27	26	28
Scotland	na	na	na	13	14	14	13	13	12	14
Northern Ireland	na	na	na	28	28	28	29	30	30	33
United Kingdom	21	23	23	20	19	19	18	18	18	21

Notes:
(a) The value of milk production as a proportion of the value of final agricultural output (gross output less transactions within the agricultural industry)
(p) provisional
na not readily available
Source:
Defra

Table 3. UK farm gate milk prices by country

Units: p per litre

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001(p)*
Great Britain	na	na	na	24.9	25.1	22.3	19.4	18.3	16.8	19.4
Northern Ireland	19.2	21.5	21.2	25.4	24.0	20.6	19.3	18.5	18.0	18.5
United Kingdom	21.0	22.0	22.4	24.9	25.0	22.1	19.4	18.4	16.9	19.3

Notes:
Prices are quoted after deduction of marketing expenses (transport costs) but not superlevy, and includes bonuses.
Data for England, Wales and Scotland are not available separately.
(p) provisional
na not available
Source:
DARD, NI; Defra

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many dairy farmers there were; and what the average dairy herd size was, in each nation of the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [79751]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA is able to provide data for England only. Figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for the devolved authorities.

Number of farmers, partners, directors and spouses (if working on the holding) and average dairy herd size on holdings with any dairy cattle—England 1991–2001:

Year	*Farmers, Partners, Directors & Spouses on Holdings with Dairy any Cattle*	*Average Size of Dairy Herd*
1991	52647	69
1992	51312	69
1993	50402	70
1994	49592	73
1995	47515	73
1996	46150	75
1997	44711	74
1998	45165	74
1999	43119	78
2000	40796	79
2001	38526	82

Number of Farmers, Partners, Directors and Spouses (if working on the holding) and average dairy herd size on holdings where the main activity is classified as dairy farming—England 1991–2001:

Year	*Farmers, Partners, Directors & Spouses on Dairy Type Holdings*	*Average Size of Dairy Herd*
1991	42013	72
1992	40464	72

Year	Farmers, Partners, Directors & Spouses on Dairy Type Holdings	Average Size of Dairy Herd
1993	35665	75
1994	39744	77
1995	37844	76
1996	36656	78
1997	35334	77
1998	34604	78
1999	33373	83
2000	31316	86
2001	29732	90

Notes:
1. Refers to main holdings only.
2. A dairy cow is defined as a cow or heifer in the dairy herd that has calved.

Source:
June Agricultural and Horticultural Census

These are consolidated figures for the United Kingdom. The figures for Great Britain were derived from the computer system used to issue export health certificates. The figures for Northern Ireland were derived from the system which records movements of animals between Member States. All figures are subject to updating and amendment.

Packaging

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if the Government will introduce legislation to compel the use of biodegradeable materials for packaging of goods. [70260]

Margaret Beckett: Some retailers are using a substitute for plastics in some types of packaging made from potato starch. This material is entirely biodegradeable and can be composted. Other biodegradeable materials are manufactured based on modified plastics made from mineral oil. These materials still have to be sent for recycling after use. We do not therefore plan to introduce legislation to compel the use of biodegradeable materials for packaging of goods, but we do strongly support the development of biodegradeable materials from non-fossil sources.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for what reason the United Kingdom made no application to the EU for a share of its 2003 funding programme to control animal diseases and zoonoses. [78364]

Margaret Beckett: The UK has applied for and obtained EU funding in support of agreed control programmes for 2002 and previous years. In respect of the 2003 claims, claims for TB and Brucella were not received by the Commission until after the 1 June 2002 deadline. We are in discussion with the Commission in an attempt to correct the position.

Flood Defences

Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a statement on completing the Shrewsbury flood defence scheme. [79994]

Mr. Morley: Defra approved the grant aiding of the Environment Agency's flood alleviation scheme for the Frankwell area of Shrewsbury in October 2001. I understand that work is expected to be substantially complete by June 2003 although, weather permitting, the defence should be operational before the end of November 2002.

The Agency is continuing to consider the viability of sustainable defence measures for other areas of Shrewsbury, although in the current situation I understand that there is little likelihood that a further scheme could be justified.

Cod

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her Answer to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute at European Standing Committee A on 23 April 2002 column 7, what steps she is taking to persuade the European Commission that banning trawling for nephrops will have a very small impact on cod recovery. [79607]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* The European Commission has yet to bring forward its proposals for the management of commercial fish stocks in 2003, following the recent recommendations from international scientists for a moratorium on most directed cod fishing and also on fishing for other species unless the taking of cod as a bycatch can be eliminated. We are working closely with the fishing industry to devise a package of measures which we can advocate in the EU and which will respect the scientific assessment whilst as far as possible keeping fishing opportunities open for the industry. We have already reminded the Commission of our view—substantiated last year by detailed scientific analysis—that curbing nephrops fishing brings minimal benefit to cod.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute at European Standing Committee A on 23 April, 2002 *Official Report*, column 7, if she will place in the Library *(a)* her Department's evidence to the European Commission which demonstrated that the level of cod by-catch in the nephrops fishery was very small and that the Commission's figures were an overestimate and *(b)* the European Commission's response; and if she will make a statement. [80055]

Mr. Morley: The Fisheries Departments in the UK submitted material to the European Commission on several occasions in 2001, refuting in detail the Commission's argument that cutting nephrops fishing significantly benefits cod stocks. The specifics of this correspondence are confidential, but the basis of the case was figures demonstrating that landings of cod did not increase in line with landings of nephrops. This material was submitted in support of the UK's request for in-year restoration of the cuts that were made to the Total Allowable Catches for nephrops in the North Sea, in the Irish Sea and West of Scotland in 2001: in response, the Commission did not agree to restore the cuts, but did subsequently largely withdraw its

proposals for further substantial cuts for 2002. Restoration of the cuts made in 2001 is an issue we are still actively pressing with the Commission.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimate her Department has made of the weight and value of cod discarded in each of the fish management areas in the seas around the UK as a result of an unintentional by-catch of over quota cod in each year since 1997 and the latest available estimate for 2002; [79022]

(2) if her Department has estimated the total weight and potential value of fish discarded by UK fishing vessels as a result of the unintentional by-catch of over quota fish. [79023]

Mr. Morley: Estimates of discards are obtained by placing observers on a random sample of fishing vessels. Observers are not in a position to establish fully the reasons why fish are discarded, but the main reasons appear to be that fish are undersized, not of sufficient quality, or damaged. We are not able at this time to provide estimates for discards of all species in all sea areas. Estimates of the weight of cod discards (in tonnes, gutted) by *(a)* English and Welsh vessels in the North Sea and Irish Sea and *(b)* UK vessels landing into Scotland, are set out below.

(a) English & Welsh Vessels

	North Sea			*Irish Sea*	
Year	*< Legal Size*	*> Legal Size*	*Year*	*< Legal Size*	*> Legal Size*
1997	2191	636	1997	nd	nd
1998	2232	668	1998	nd	nd
1999	772	274	1999	nd	nd
2000	444	52	2000	17	3
2001	453	60	2001	4	2
2002*	80	11	2002	<1	0

Notes:
* January to June
nd = no data

(b) UK vessels landing into Scotland

Year	*North Sea (IV)*		
	< Legal Limit	*> Legal Limit*	*Total*
1997	4412.2	1659.9	6072.1
1998	6669.1	2122.9	8792.0
1999	2135.2	420.9	2556.1
2000	3077.0	462.1	3539.1
2001	3195.0	600.0	3795.0
2002*	1155.4	50.1	1205.5

Year	*West Coast (Via)*		
	< Legal Limit	*> Legal Limit*	*Total*
1997	163.6	26.8	190.4
1998	181.0	66.0	247.0
1999	52.8	0.3	53.1
2000	335.5	14.3	349.8
2001	79.6	39.0	118.6
2002*	33.5	15.2	48.7

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much in outstanding claims against her Department is owed in respect of clean-up operations on farms affected by foot and mouth disease. [76841]

Margaret Beckett: It is not possible at this time to reveal details of these claims for reasons of commercial confidentiality and legal privilege. Defra is pursuing the recommendation in the NAO report on the 2001 Outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease concerned with the urgent pursuit of those cases where my Department believed it was overcharged for goods and services. Irregularities in contractors' claims are being investigated and resolved as quickly as possible. We have an obligation to ensure proper accounting methods are applied to valid invoices submitted. We have no intention of simply paying Invoices and claims that cannot be properly accounted for.

Microlisation

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to provide match funding for microlisation; and if she will make a statement; [79231]

(2) what steps she has taken to increase the money for modulation to UK farms from the UK; and if she will make a statement. [79234]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The UK is obliged under Community law to match-fund, pound for pound, money raised through modulating Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) production subsidies. Under current plans, the rate of modulation will rise from the present 3 per cent. to 4.5 per cent. by 2006.

The spending plans for 2003–04 to 2005–06, set out in the 2002 Spending Review White Paper "Opportunity and Security for All" (Command Paper 5570) presented to the House on 15 July by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, include provision for match funding of £75m in 2005–06. This would be necessary if the rate of modulation were to be increased to 10 per cent. from 2005–06, as recommended by the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. However, a decision on increasing national modulation has yet to be taken. The final decision will depend on factors including the success of a pilot to test the Policy Commission's recommendation for an entry-level agri-environment scheme, and the outcome of negotiations on the Mid-Term review of the CAP.

Fly Tipping and Landfill

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions she has had with farmers about fly tipping and landfill taxes; and if she will make a statement. [79238]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Defra Ministers hold many meetings with farming organisations to discuss all manner of topics. However, there have been no recent meetings to discuss fly tipping specifically. The Government is, however, keen to find out more about the causes of fly tipping and has commissioned research into fly tipping on agricultural land.

Fly tipped waste is a blight on our countryside and towns. There are stringent controls in place to ensure that waste is dealt with properly. Where waste is disposed of illegally, it is clearly essential that steps are taken to dispose of the waste safely and properly to eliminate the risk of environmental pollution or harm to human health. The Environment Agency and local authorities, in their role as waste collection authority, may themselves take steps to remove fly tipped waste. DEFRA works closely with the fly tipping stakeholders forum to develop practical ways to combat the problem.

A Tidy Britain Group Report *Effects of the Landfill Tax on Fly Tipping* (published in 1998) did not establish any clear link between the tax and increased fly tipping. Indeed, the Report states that in 1997–98, domestic waste was, overall, the type of fly tipped waste most frequently collected by local authorities. As the tax does not directly affect householders it is unlikely to cause householders to fly tip waste. Moreover, each Waste Disposal Authority has a duty under section 51 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to provide civic amenity sites for the deposit of household waste.

TB Testing

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans she has to increase the rate of TB testing in Gloucestershire; and if she will make a statement. [79314]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Since an additional £3 million was made available to the State Veterinary Service earlier this year, veterinary, technical and administrative staff have been recruited to bring the administrative and veterinary teams dealing with TB in the Gloucester Animal Health Divisional Office up to full strength. Twenty temporary and casual staff have been recruited specifically for TB testing in addition to the normal complement of veterinary officers. This is starting to have a significant impact across the range of critical TB areas.

In early October Defra announced additional measures for the control of bovine TB in England, which included a timetable for the imposition of movement restrictions on herds with overdue tests. Within the Gloucester region the backlog of overdue tests is being actively managed to ensure that the number of herds put under restriction early next year as a result of the new measure is kept to a minimum. A dedicated team of six administrative staff has been set up to support the process. Letters will be sent out shortly to those farmers potentially affected encouraging them to arrange early TB tests. Defra is also maintaining close liaison with the NFU at county level.

20-Day Standstill Rule

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans she has to review the 20 day standstill rule; and if she will make a statement. [79317]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* This will depend on the outcome of the detailed risk assessment and cost benefit analysis which is being carried out in line with the FMD Inquiry recommendations. We hope to be able to take account of emerging findings to make decisions about any changes to the current rules in time for the Spring 2003 movement season.

GM Seeds

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which GM crop varieties started national seed listing trials in September 2002; if she will give their *(a)* locations and *(b)* dates of planting; and if each trial is (i) a distinctiveness, uniformity and stability and (ii) a value for cultivation and use trial. [79737]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* No new GM candidate varieties started National List tests and trials in September 2002. Three Winter Oilseed Rape varieties, PHW99–429, PHW01–441, PHW02–450, were already in test and trial and these were sown again in September 2002. Of these, PHW99–429 has already completed Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability testing and was sown in Value for Cultivation and Use trials only. The site locations and dates of sowing are as follows;

Type of Test or Trial	*Location*	*Date of Sowing*
Distinctness Uniformity and Stability	Sand Hutton, Yorkshire	6 September 2002
Value for Cultivation and Use	Thorganby, Lincolnshire	6 September 2002
	Meden Vale, Nottinghamshire	12 September 2002
	Felton, Herefordshire	12 September 2002
	Melbourn, Cambridgeshire	10 September 2002
	Piccotts End, Hertfordshire	16 September 2002
	Shellingford, Oxfordshire	13 September 2002
	Bramham, Yorkshire	4 September 2002
	Banham, Norfolk	5 September 2002
	Udny, Aberdeenshire	11 September 2002

Climate Change

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many climate change levy underlying agreements within the meaning of paragraph 48 of Schedule 6 to the Finance Act 2000 she has *(a)* entered into and *(b)* varied or; if she will give the name of the other party or parties to each such agreement or variation; if she will indicate, in relation to each such agreement, the umbrella agreement within the meaning of the same paragraph to which it relates; and if she will place in the Library copies of all such agreements and variations. [78725]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State currently is party to 5,460 underlying agreements within the meaning of paragraph 48 of Schedule 6 to the Finance Act 2000. The original umbrella agreements are placed in the Library and on the Defra website. The names of the operators of facilities currently covered by the underlying agreements are published, sector by sector, in Reduced Rate Certificates on HM Customs and Excise website. The underlying agreements contain commercially sensitive material in the form of energy efficiency targets and consequently cannot be published, though the standard template is also available on the Defra website. Variations to these agreements to date cover only new entrants to the agreements, withdrawals

from them and changes of contact details. It would involve excessive costs to publish the variations involving these changes to company details. We have been in discussions with sector associations regarding variations to the agreements to provide for corrections to targets resulting from corrections to baseline data. The proportional improvements in energy efficiency required has been maintained. Any further variations to the provisions of the agreements will be placed in the Library under the same terms as the original agreements were placed.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many climate change agreements within the meaning of paragraph 47 of Schedule 6 to the Finance Act 2000 and variations, she has entered into and what the name is of the other party or parties to each such agreement or variation; if she will make a statement in relation to each such agreement on the description of energy-intensive installations within paragraph 51 of Schedule 6 to the Finance Act 2000 to which it relates; and if she will place in the Library copies of all such agreements and variations. [78726]

Mr. Meacher: There is one climate change agreement under paragraph 47 of Schedule 2 to the Finance Act 2000, which provided for the unique case where there was only one company operating a specific eligible IPPC process. The agreement under this paragraph therefore combines the provisions of the umbrella and underlying agreements within the meaning of paragraph 48. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House and on the DEFRA website. The agreement contains the names of the relevant parties and a description of the type of the installation covered by the agreement. There have been no variations to this agreement.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Climate Change Conference in New Delhi; and if she will place in the Library copies of *(a)* the United Kingdom submissions, *(b)* other nations' submissions relevant to UK policy and *(c)* the text of the final communiqué. [80349]

Mr. Meacher: There were two main outcomes from the Eighth Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in New Delhi, India from 23 October to 1 November 2002.

The first was that good progress was made on several technical issues which are key to building the architecture for effective implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.

The first report of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) Executive Board, established at COP7 in Marrakech, was approved. This will allow for the prompt start of the CDM and projects should start to come through the system next year. This should result in investment benefits for developing countries and help developed countries meet their Kyoto commitments. Work on how to include afforestation and reforestation projects under the CDM continued and is on track for agreement on schedule at COP10.

The final element of the guidelines on the reporting and review of accounting for total emissions under Marrakech Accords (the rules implementing Kyoto) was agreed. Regular reporting and review is essential, for transparency in the system and to ensure that parties are keeping to detailed trading rules.

There were also productive discussions on legal and institutional matters, in particular on how the first meeting of the Kyoto Protocol governing body should be convened in conjunction with the Convention governing body.

Guidance was also agreed on how developing countries should report information to the COP in their national communications. This is essential for assessing the size of the global problem and as a basis for informing decisions on future action. Guidance was also agreed for the new funds agreed in Bonn and Marrakech last year.

The second outcome was the Delhi Declaration on climate change and sustainable development. Negotiations on the text were dominated by the developing country concerns of vulnerability to climate change and the fneed for countries to adapt to it effects, and by their reluctance to initiate a process for considering what more needs to be done by the international community until greater progress has been made in implementing existing commitments under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol. The final text was therefore less forward-looking than we and our EU partners would have liked. Nevertheless, the Declaration makes important points about setting climate change in the context of sustainable development and puts a welcome focus on the needs of developing countries in trying to adapt to climate change.

There were no UK submissions on issues discussed in New Delhi because the EU negotiates as a block in the UNFCCC. Denmark, which currently holds the Presidency, made submissions on behalf of all Member States. I have today placed copies of all EU submissions relevant to UK policy in the library, along with those from other Parties to the UNFCCC on the same subjects, and a copy of the final text of the Delhi Declaration. When they are available, I will also place copies of the formal EU statements made during the conference in the Library.

Waste Tyres

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what her estimate is of the stock pile of waste tyres in England in each of the last five years. [78470]

Mr. Meacher: These data are not collected centrally in the format requested. However, the Environment Agency estimate that about 13 million tyres are currently stockpiled in 38 sites in England. The majority of the tyres are held within 8 sites, including one which holds about 9 million of the tyres. This site is covered to provide protection.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what research she is undertaking into the environmentally safe disposal of waste tyres; [78472]

(2) what assessment she has made of civil engineering uses for the environmentally safe use of waste tyres; [78433]

(3) what policies she intends to adopt to *(a)* utilise and *(b)* dispose of waste tyres. [78471]

Mr. Meacher: The Government in partnership with the tyre industry through the Used Tyre Working Group (UTWG) is investigating alternative disposal, recycling and recovery options for those tyres displaced from landfill with the aim of ensuring that sufficient capacity is available to handle those tyres.

The prospect of the extra required tyre recovery capacity being developed in time for the 2006 ban appears encouraging. It is likely that cement kilns (who use tyres as fuel) will take very significant numbers of tyres provided they obtain the necessary authorisations (four kilns already use tyres).

In addition, the market for tyre granulate is growing. Tyre granulate has a number of applications including carpet underlay and sports and safety surfaces. Government is supporting a number of end-use studies including its incorporation in road surfaces and as an aggregate replacement in concrete. Other studies are looking at new processes to break down used tyres as well as looking at ways of improving the efficiency of present materials recycling operations. Government is also supporting research into the use of tyres in coastal and flood protection schemes.

There is also research underway, funded through the Landfill Tax Credits Scheme in collaboration with the Transport Research Laboratory and the Institute of Civil Engineers, to produce guidance on civil engineering applications for used tyres to stimulate market development. Whole tyres are already used extensively as an engineering material in landfill sites.

More widely, research is underway on creating longer-lasting tyres (without compromising safety) in order to help reduce the amount of tyres entering the waste stream in the first place.

Organic Cattle

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a grant to Mr. Richard Smith of Sharpham, Totnes, Devon, to make good the failure of the Beef Assurance Scheme in relation to his cows and followers; and if she will make a statement as to the practices undertaken by her Department to help farmers rearing organic cattle. [78918]

Mr. Morley*[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* No grants are available for Beef Assurance Scheme members who are having difficulties finding local abattoirs willing to slaughter cattle aged 30–42 months because of EU requirements on testing and the removal of vertebral column. However, the Food Standards Agency will seek to put members in touch with abattoirs which will slaughter such cattle.

The Department seeks to promote all aspects of organic farming in line with the Organic Action Plan published on 29 July. Free advice is available to all farmers contemplating organic farming through the Organic Conversion Information Service. Aid for organic conversion, delivered through the England Rural Development Programme, amounts to some £140 million. The Department also funds organic R&D, including projects on both organic dairy and beef cattle husbandry and it is providing a series of meetings to help organic cattle farmers maintain high standards of health and welfare in their herds.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what public consultations have been commenced by her Department in each month since 20 July; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80267]

Alun Michael: Information on public consultation processes undertaken by Defra is held in the public domain and can be obtained from the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk. in the section titled "Consultation Exercises".

Details as to the issue date and deadlines for comments are available and contact details regarding each consultation are provided. Responses to public consultations where the respondents have not asked for anonymity are also listed on this website page.

Welbeck Tip

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when she expects to be able to answer the letters sent to the Environment Minister on 5 October 2001 and 20 February 2002 by the hon. Member for Wakefield regarding the Welbeck Tip. [62309]

Mr. Meacher: I regret that the Department can find no trace of my hon. Friend's correspondence.

Chemicals

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what agreements were reached at the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg relating to chemicals. [77572]

Mr. Meacher: The main points agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in relation to chemicals are contained in paragraph 22 of the Plan of Implementation.

These include an overarching target of "aiming to achieve by 2020 that chemicals are produced and used in ways that lead to the minimisation of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment". This would include actions at all levels to:

(a) Promote the ratification and implementation of relevant international instruments on chemicals and hazardous wastes.

(b) Encourage countries to implement the new globally harmonised system for the classification and labelling of chemicals

(c) Encourage partnerships to promote activities aimed at enhancing environmentally sound management of chemicals and hazardous wastes

(d) Promote efforts to prevent international illegal trafficking of hazardous chemicals and hazardous wastes

(e) Encourage development of coherent and integrated information on chemicals

(f) Promote reduction of the risks posed by heavy metals that are harmful to human health and the environment

A copy of the Plan of Implementation is in the House Library and can be found at http://www/johannesburgsummit.org/, along with a copy of the Political Declaration made at Johannesburg.

Plastic Waste

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what her latest estimate is of the value of non-recyclable plastic waste used for *(a)* landfill and *(b)* incineration for each London borough. [79639]

Mr. Meacher: This information is not available.

Animal Movements

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what changes have been made in the 20 day rule on animal movements since its introduction; and if she will make a statement. [79405]

Mr. Morley: A number of changes to the 20 day whole farm standstill rule have been made over recent months, following detailed discussions with industry and veterinary organisations. These include exemptions, subject to risk mitigating conditions, for breeding animals, calves, tack sheep and all movements direct to slaughter. Most recently, an exemption from the whole farm standstill was introduced on 6 September 2002 for cattle and sheep moved for breeding purposes, if they remain in approved isolation facilities for 20 days.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make an amendment to the 20 day standstill rule in the event of livestock being brought to feed for a period ranging from three to 12 months where the bid price is not reached to enable the producer to take livestock home and to prevent cattle and sheep from being slaughtered. [79437]

Mr. Morley: The mixing of animals at auction markets and their subsequent dispersal poses a particular disease risk so it is unlikely that any special exemptions to the 20 day rule will be introduced to cover these particular circumstances.

More generally, future animal movement controls will reflect the outcome of the detailed risk assessment and cost benefit analysis which is being carried out in line with the FMD Inquiry recommendations. We hope to be able to take account of emerging findings when we make decisions about any changes to the current rules in time for the 2003 Spring movement season.

Horticulture Research International

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what funding has been allocated to Horticulture Research International in each of the last 10 years. [79757]

Mr. Morley: Defra funding at Horticulture Research International (HRI) relates to specifically commissioned R & D projects and work won by HRI in the main through R & D competitions. We have also provided funding for capital and other purposes. A summary of the funding provided by Defra (and, prior to 2001–02, MAFF) in each of the last ten years is given in the table below.

Table showing Defra funding of Horticulture Research International over the period 1992–2002

Year	R&D payments[1]	CMF[2]	Restructuring and pensions	Capital & other payments	Total (£m)
1992–1993	13.5	–	–	7.3	20.8
1993–1994	13.7	–	–	11.3	25.0
1994–1995	13.9	–	0.1	7.3	21.3
1995–1996	13.3	–	0.4	9.5	23.2
1996–1997	12.7	–	1.0	4.6	18.3
1997–1998	12.3	–	–	1.7	14.0
1998–1999	12.3	–	5.9	0.4	18.6
1999–2000	11.4	–	–	0.4	11.8
2000–2001	10.4	0.3	4.2	1.0	15.9
2001–2002	10.4	1.5	1.6	0.2	13.7

Notes:
[1] Figures given on an acruals basis as shown in HRI's accounts
[2] Funds from HMT's Capital Modernisation Fund

GM Crops

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which of the GM farm scale trials of maize, oil seed rape and beet planted between Autumn 2001 and Spring 2002 *(a)* ran until harvest and *(b)* were terminated; and what the reasons for termination were in each case. [79739]

Mr. Meacher: In Autumn 2001 a total of 30 winter oil seed rape crops were sown. One field was subsequently terminated following the advice of the scientific steering committee at their meeting of May 20 2002 (minutes at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/fse) as a result of the crop failing to establish; apparently due to the weather. The remainder ran until harvest.

In Spring 2002 the following number of FSE crop fields were planted: 25 spring oil seed rape; 16 beet and 33 maize. Two maize fields were terminated prior to harvest following extensive damage by protestors that rendered any further studies on the site impossible. No spring oil seed rape or beet crops were terminated.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will place the tender documents for the biodiversity monitoring on the farm scale evaluations on sugar beet and fodder beet, the contracts for that work and related correspondence in the Library; if she will list the sites in England and Wales where releases of GM oilseed rape were made in 2000 and 2001 under the consent 98/R19/18; and if she will list the genetic transformation events in Aventis' spring oilseed rape released under the consent 00/R33/9 and other experimental release consents granted for this transformation under the GMO Deliberate Regulations. [80214]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend the Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham and Deptford (Joan Ruddock), *Official Report*, 6 April 2001, column 321W, which announced that a copy of each of the four farm-scale evaluation contracts, which include the invitations to tender, the tenders themselves, the project specification and the covering letter, have been placed in the Library.

In 2001, there were no releases in England or Wales under consent 98/R19/18. In 2000, there were no releases in Wales under consent 98/R19/18. In England, the locations of releases under this consent are summarised below.

Nearest Village	*County*
Little Shelford	Cambridgeshire
St Osyth, Seawick	Essex
Kempley	Gloucestershire
Chipping Campden	Gloucestershire
Itchen Abbas	Hampshire
Piccots End	Hertfordshire
Boothby Graffoe	Lincolnshire
North Kelsey	Lincolnshire
Horningtoft	Norfolk
Meden Vale	Nottinghamshire
Appleton	Oxfordshire
Alderminster	Warwickshire
Upper Tysoe	Warwickshire
Priors Hardwick	Warwickshire
Laverton	Worcestershire
East Newton	North Yorkshire
Hutton Magna	North Yorkshire

The transformation events in oilseed rape covered by consent 00/R33/9 are Ms8 and Rf3. Since 2000 releases of oilseed rape containing these events have also been carried out under consents 00/R33/5, 00/R33/6, 00/R33/7, 00/R33/10, 00/R33/11 and 98/R19/18 in England and 00/R33/5S, 00/R33/6S, 00/R33/7S, 00/R33/10S, 00/R33/11S and 98/R19/18 in Scotland.

Farm Incomes

Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, what the average farm incomes, by sector, were for each year since 1992 for farms within Shrewsbury and Atcham. [80340]

Mr. Morley: It is not possible to provide data relating to the Shrewsbury and Atcham area. This is because the sample size of the Farm Business Survey (the basis of the income data) is too small to enable robust regional analysis to this level of disaggregation. The closest region available is England West.

The table below shows average net farm income by the main types of farm for England West for each year from 1992–3 to 2000–1. The data for each year provide the best estimate of income levels in each year in isolation but they should not be viewed as a time series. Each year is not directly comparable due to changes in the underlying sample that occur each year in the Farm Business Survey (the basis for the income data).

Average net farm income by farm type for the West of England:

Net Farm Income (£/farm)	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*
Dairy	24,939	33,228	29,295	34,927	28,485	19,306	12,475	8,847	11,887
LFA Cattle & Sheep	8,919	10,501	7,533	13,113	11,646	5,193	2,101	2,572	3,008
Lowland Cattle & Sheep	8,392	7,709	8,115	9,910	6,098	−1,426	527	923	−3,008
Cereals	20,052	20,401	25,538	46,126	35,014	14,570	4,059	4,331	2,529
General Cropping	22,726	23,918	51,377	48,561	24,083	16,752	40,726	5,606	10,239
Pigs & Poultry	24,929	16,713	22,446	39,000	43,316	16,406	5,979	17,817	33,930
Mixed	18,720	20,400	30,580	40,357	31,594	6,799	3,115	8,642	6,085
Horticulture	10,611	14,860	24,397	19,770	20,404	20,283	29,182	19,889	15,212
All Types	19,572	20,715	23,451	29,777	22,574	11,280	8,926	5,628	6,112

Source:
Net farm income is defined as the return to the principal farmer and spouse for their labour and on the tenant-type capital of the business.

Agricultural Wages Board

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her Answer of 21st October (75916) what relevant qualifications Professor Ian Smith and Mrs Jacquie Findlay had for nomination as an independent member of the Agricultural Wages Board. [76816]

Alun Michael: Independent members of the Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales are not required to hold any specific qualifications. However when new members are appointed we do try to ensure that collectively, the independent members have experience of as many areas of expertise relevant to the Board's work as possible. These include EU and UK employment legislation, EU and UK social policy, arbitration and conciliation, human resource management, tribunal work, accountancy and economic issues. Jacquie Findlay has relevant experience in the human resource field and has advised on employment law matters. Ian Smith is a Professor of employment law at Anglia University.

To ensure their impartiality, independent members must have no direct connection with the agricultural industry or any connection with organisations representing employers of agricultural labour or representing the interests of agricultural workers. This excludes from consideration any member of the National Farmers' Union or the Transport and General Workers Union, the organisations that nominate the representative members of the Wages Board.

Plastic Bags

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what consultation she is undertaking on the introduction of a charge for plastic bags given out in shops; and if she will make a statement. [79638]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Taxes are a matter for the Chancellor.

Earth Summit

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to circulate Local Agenda 21 groups on the Government's evaluation of the Earth Summit held in Johannesburg. [79636]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State has already held initial discussions with local government about the outcomes of WSSD. I will be discussing the way forward with stakeholders.

Aflatoxin Infections

Mr. John Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many incidents there have been of aflatoxin infections in each of the last five years. [75922]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Data from the national poisons information service reveals that they have received two enquiries over the last five years relating to aflatoxin poisoning. In neither case were there any signs or symptoms observed. Both occurred in 1997.

Capital Grants

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environmental Food and Rural Affairs, what the estimated total cost is of delivering a 10 year 70,000 solar PV roof programme, funded by 50 per cent capital grants; and if she will make a statement. [79662]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government Industry Photovoltaic Group Report of March 2001 recommended "The most effective means of encouraging the deployment of PV in the UK would be a major Market Stimulation Programme featuring a 50 per cent capital grant for 70,000 domestic roofs and a similar grant scheme for larger non—domestic buildings costing around £150 million over 10 years." Taken together this is equivalent to a 100,000 PV roofs programme.

Income

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, what changes have taken place in the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net incomes of the (i) top and (ii) bottom deciles of farmers in each year since 1990. [79406]

Mr. Morley: The information for the years 1996–97 to 2000–01 are given in the table.

Ranges of farm incomes for full-time farms in England (£ per farm)

	Cash income		*Net Farm Income*	
	First decile (10th percentile)	*Ninth decile (90th percentile)*	*First decile (10th percentile)*	*Ninth decile (90th percentile)*
1996–97	6,200	118,100	−3,400	72,000
1997–98	100	94,200	−12,600	41,300
1998–99	−400	83,500	−14,900	38,100
1999–00	0	73,800	−14,800	33,600
2000–01	−1,400	77,500	−14,800	35,500

Source:
Farm Business Survey

I regret that the information given in a previous answer to my hon. Friend, *Official Report*, 22 January, column 779W, was incorrect. The figures had been mistakenly calculated for England and Wales, not for England. The information in this table corrects those figures.

Data for the six years 1990–1995 could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Non-devolved Posts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many non-devolved posts were advertised in the Press in each year from June 1999; and what percentage of them were advertised in the Scottish Press. [76852]

Alun Michael: This information is being collated and I will write to the hon. Member.

Energy Conservation

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions she has had with energy conservation authorities regarding her policy on home energy conservation. [77415]

Mr. Morley: Neither the Secretary of State nor any of Defra Ministers have had any discussions with energy conservation authorities regarding home energy conservation.

Energy Efficiency

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) pursuant to the Answer of 15 October, *Official Report*, columns 581–2W, on energy efficiency, to the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed), if the legal advice obtained by the promoters of the Home Energy Conservation Bill regarding the legal force of a principal aim compared with a statutory duty was made available to her; what steps she took to determine the validity of the promoters' advice; and what her conclusions were about the validity of the advice; [77447]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 15 October, *Official Report*, columns 581–2W, to the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire, on energy efficiency, what advice was received about the duties that having a 30 per cent. improvement as a principal aim would place on local authorities; [77446]

(3) pursuant to her answer of 15 October, *Official Report*, columns 581–2W, to the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire, whether the advice that she received on the implications of having a 30 per cent. improvement in domestic energy efficiency as a principal aim of the Home Energy Conservation Bill suggested that progress towards such a principal aim could legally be made by *(a)* new regulation and *(b)* energy efficiency programmes funded by bodies other than the Government. [77440]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have seen the legal advice obtained by the promoters of this Bill. We sought our own advice on it, which did not reach the same conclusions. The Government does not comment on the details of its internal advice, but I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Mid

Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) on 15th October, *Official Report*, columns 581–2W, which sets out some of the issues which the Government considered.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Contaminated Land

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the amount of contaminated land that has been restored for beneficial use on an annual basis was, broken down by local authority area, in England and Wales since January 1997. [79596]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held centrally in the form requested, because "beneficial use" is not a criterion in the main regime which helps to secure the remediation of land affected by contamination. From April 2000, Part IIA ("contaminated land") of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 placed local authorities in England under a duty to inspect their areas to identify contaminated land, as defined in the Act, and secure its remediation on the "suitable for use" principle. Some 40 sites have so far been formally identified under this regime, and remediation is underway in some of these cases. The main aim of this regime is environmental protection, rather than future land use, and contaminated sites may well be in beneficial use already.

The majority of remediation, however, takes place as part and parcel of the development of land, regulated through the planning system and building regulations; through urban regeneration programmes including the activities of regional development agencies and English Partnerships; through voluntary action by landowners including many major companies; through enforcement of environmental protection regimes; and through the programme of supplementary credit approvals for local authorities operated by my department. An overview is provided by a recent Environment Agency report, "Dealing with contaminated land in England", copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Census

Bob Laxton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what the population was of each local authority in England based on the 2001 census; what the change was in the population of each authority since the mid year 2000 estimate; and what the change was as a percentage in each case. [79865]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The Information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter to Mr. Bob Laxton from Mr. Len Cook dated 7 November 2002

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking for details of the population of each local authority based on the 2001 Census; what the change was for each authority since the mid year 2000 estimate; and what the change was as a percentage in each case.(79865)

I am placing in the House of Commons Library, a table which supplies the information you have requested. It is also available on the National Statistics website at www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/downloads/Comparison—ONC2001—MYE2000.xls. The current estimates for the years 1982–2000 are based on the 1981 Census figures, rolled forward, and will be shortly revised to take account of the results of the 2001 Census and an assessment of the cumulative errors that have built up in the mid-year estimates. Final revised mid-year estimates for 1991–2000 will be released on 13 February 2003 and those for 1982–1990 at a later date.

In order to assist users in interpreting changes over time, ONS have issued a set of interim revised national estimates for the period 1982–2000. At the national level, for example, the previous mid-year estimate for population of England and Wales for 2000, of 52,943 thousand has now been accordingly revised to 51,913 thousand.

Littering Offences

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, how many fixed penalty notices were issued in England and Wales broken down by local authority area since 1997. [79670]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

The total amount of fines issued with respect to Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for littering offences in England and Wales since 1997 was:

No data in 1996–97
727 in 1997–98
4,778 in 1998–99
2,970 in 1999–2000
2,310 in 2000–01

The Department is unable to break down this data into Local Authority region.

Advantage West Midlands

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, if she will list the members of Advantage West Midlands; from what areas they are drawn; what their function is; how they were chosen; how they can be dismissed; what they will cost in 2002–03; and from what vote they are paid. [79846]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Board members of Advantage West Midlands are;

Chairman Alex Stephenson, Deputy Chair Cllr Sue Davies, Richard Barnes,

Prof Kumar Bhattacharyya, Cllr Sir Albert Bore, Dr. Anthony Harris,

Dr. Christine King, Brian Woods-Scawen, Cllr David Sparkes,

Sukhvinder Kaur Stubbs, Norman Price, Isabella Moore,

Cllr Paul Tilsley, Tony Sealey, Bill Holmes.

Board Members are drawn from Business, Local Authorities, Higher Education, the Voluntary Sector, Employees Representation Groups and Rural Interests.

The function of Board Members is;

To direct and hold the executive team accountable for results

To reflect regional interests

To oversee and approve the production and review of the Regional Economic Strategy and corporate plan for presentation to Ministers

To chair and facilitate meetings

To represent Advantage West Midlands externally.

EU Equal Treatment Directive

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, when he intends to publish draft regulations and draft consolidated legislation on the age strand of the consultation Equality and Diversity: The Way Ahead with a view to implementing the EU Equal Treatment Directive; and if he will make a statement. [79411]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

Unfortunately I have not been able to glean the information necessary to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

The process for appointing the Board Members is run according to the Code of Practice issued by the Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments (OCPA).

Appointments are made on merit, following open competition, application and formal interviews. Each applicant is assessed against the selection criteria, as set out in the person specification for the post.

A Board Member can be dismissed by the Secretary of State for Trade & Industry if he or she is in breach of conditions in Schedule 2 of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998.

Current pay rates per annum are, Chair £47,800, Deputy Chair £15,208 and Board Members £7,604. All Members are eligible to claim Travel & Subsistence.

Board Members are paid from the DTI vote approved by Parliament, via the RDA single programme, which is administered by DTI.

Mayoral Elections

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* local councils and *(c)* other bodies on mayoral elections and referenda since January 2001. [78630]

Mr. Raynsford: Departmental costs on mayoral elections and referendums are not separately identified from costs related to work on new council constitutions generally. Information on expenditure by local authorities or other bodies on these matters is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Pathfinders Housing Allowance

Mr. Stephen O Brien: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will list those constituencies in which Pathfinder for Housing Allowance is being made available. [77549]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

On 21 October, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State wrote to the hon. Members whose constituencies cover those local authorities which we have invited to be pathfinders for the standard local housing allowance.

The table lists the pathfinder authorities, along with the parliamentary constituencies which fall wholly or partially within those authority boundaries.

Local Authority	*Parliamentary Constituency*
Brighton & Hove City Council	Kemptown
	Brighton Pavilion
	Hove
City of Edinburgh	Edinburgh East and Musselburgh
	Edinburgh West
	Edinburgh North and Leith
	Edinburgh Pentlands
	Edinburgh South
	Edinburgh Central
	Livingston
	Midlothian
County Borough of Conwy	Meirionnyddnant Conway
	Conwy
	Clwyd West
Coventry City Council	Coventry North East
	Coventry North West
	Coventry South
Leeds City Council	Elmet
	Leeds Central
	Leeds East
	Leeds North East
	Leeds North West
	Leeds West
	Morley & Rothwell
	Pudsey
London Borough of Lewisham	Lewisham Deptford
	Lewisham East
	Lewisham West
Middlesbrough Council	Middlesbrough
	Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland
North East Lincolnshire	Cleethorpes
	Great Grimsby
Teignbridge District Council	Teignbridge
	Totnes
Tendring District Council	Essex North
	Harwich

Firefighters' Strike

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he has contingency plans to allow the Armed Forces access to standard fire service fire engines during Fire Service strikes. [77024]

Mr. Raynsford: We are currently reviewing the availability of all appliances that could be deployed in the event of a strike by firefighters.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he has taken to provide for emergency cover in the event of floods during any strike by fire brigade personnel. [77793]

Mr. Raynsford: The role played by the Fire Service in relation to flooding is to assist with rescue and to pump water from flooded properties. In the event of industrial action, the military response will be primarily directed towards saving life. It is therefore important that local authorities should ensure they are up to date with names of contractors and equipment suppliers who could be called upon to assist during a flooding event. They should also formulate plans to arrange early evacuation if severe flooding is forecast.

The Environment Agency's flood warning systems will continue to operate as normal. The Agency has also reviewed its emergency plans, in close liaison with local authorities and the police. The Agency will seek to assist the emergency services and local authorities as far as practicable by mobilising their resources including pumps and equipment, once it has ensured that its own systems and defences are secure.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what his estimate is of the number of fire fighting emergency vehicles which will be available in Somerset in the event of a firefighters strike; how many are available in a non-strike situation; and if he will make a statement; [77002]

(2) what the Government's target is for the maximum time taken to get a fire engine to an emergency call-out within Somerset; what assessment he has made of whether this target will still be met during the planned firefighters' strike; and if he will make a statement; [77521]

(3) what correspondence he has received within the last two months from the Leader of Somerset County Council about the firefighters' strike; if he will publish his response to such correspondence; and if he will make a statement; [77522]

(4) what assessment he has made of the ability of local authorities and the armed forces to maintain a safe level of fire service in Somerset during the planned firefighters' strike; and if he will make a statement; [77524]

(5) how many fire engines will be available for deployment in the Yeovil constituency during the planned firefighters' strike; what assessment he has made of the minimum safe level; and if he will make a statement. [77525]

Mr. Raynsford: Emergency cover in Somerset is currently planned to consist of a number of elements including five Green Goddesses, three breathing apparatus teams (BARTs), rescue teams equipped with specialist equipment, (RESTs) and the police. The Somerset Fire Brigade has 48 pumping appliances, although not all these will be operational at any one time. Two Green Goddesses and a BART will be based at RNAS Yeovilton, 2 Green Goddesses, a BART and a REST will be based at Taunton. 1 Green Goddess and 1 BART will be based at Bridgewater.

The provision of Ministry of Defence emergency fire cover has been planned in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer to minimise call-out response times and maximise the availability of a range of firefighting capabilities.

The command and operational structure for emergency fire cover has been designed to enable maximum flexibility and use of available resources, whether from within a county or from assets deployed nearby in neighbouring counties. The deployment of firefighters will be based on the assessment of how best to respond to an emergency in the quickest time possible. The deployment will be kept under review.

The target attendance times for Fire Brigade appliances vary according to the location of the reported incident, ranging from five minutes in busy high risk city centres to twenty minutes in rural areas. In the event of a firefighters strike it is not expected that military emergency cover would be able to match these attendance times in all cases. In providing emergency fire cover the Ministry of Defence would not be seeking to replicate the current fire fighting capability. The Armed Forces role during any strike will be to ensure that essential services are maintained by providing emergency cover and, by so doing, minimise the risk to life.

The Leader of Somerset Council wrote to the Deputy Prime Minster on 4 and 25 October. My reply, which I have copied to local MPs, reflects what I have said above about the provision of emergency cover by the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what preparations he has made to ensure the safety and continuity of service to the public in Cambridgeshire in the event of a firefighters' strike; and what the cost is to the Department of these actions. [79566]

Mr. Raynsford: Emergency cover in Cambridgeshire is currently planned to consist of seven Green Goddesses, three breathing apparatus teams (BARTs), a rescue team equipped with specialist equipment, (a REST) and the police. The Green Goddesses and BARTs will be based at Peterborough, Huntingdon and Cambridge. The REST will be based at Cambridge.

The provision of Ministry of Defence emergency fire cover has been planned in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer to minimise call-out response times and maximise the availability of a range of firefighting capabilities.

The command and operational structure for emergency fire cover has been designed to enable maximum flexibility and use of available resources, whether from within a county or from assets deployed nearby in neighbouring counties. The deployment of firefighters will be based on the assessment of how best to respond to an emergency in the quickest time possible. The deployment will be kept under review.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will meet the additional costs incurred by the Ministry of Defence in providing emergency fire cover in England and Wales, net of savings in wages lost by striking firefighters. But it is very difficult to predict exactly what the cost will be. It will depend very much on what strike action the Fire Brigades Union actually takes.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) when the Independent Review Commission looking at firefighters' pay is expected to report; and if he will make a statement; [80238]

(2) if he will list the members of the Independent Review Commission examining the issue of firefighters' pay; how this membership has changed over the past two weeks; and if he will make a statement. [80237]

Mr. Raynsford: The Independent Review of the Fire Service is being conducted by Professor Sir George Bain, who has an outstanding record in industrial relations and academia. He is being assisted by Sir Anthony Young, past President of the TUC, and Sir Michael Lyons, who until recently was the Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council. The membership of the Independent Review team has not changed since it was announced in early September. Sir George hopes to be able to publish the final report in December.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what strategies his Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79286]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is committed to age diversity and is implementing the recommendations of the Government's Winning the Generation Game report.

Discrimination on the ground of age is not permitted under our equal opportunities policy.

Our recruitment, development, performance management and retention policies are continuously reviewed. There are no age barriers to employment and retirement age is determined on business needs only.

Sustainable Development

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister what role his Department expects local government to play in the delivery of *(a)* objectives agreed at the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and *(b)* sustainable development; and what steps have been taken by his Department to encourage local action. [77585]

Mr. McNulty: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be launching a major review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy in the new year. They will use this opportunity to consult stakeholders, including local authorities, on UK action to implement the Johannesburg commitments domestically.

The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to prepare community strategies for promoting the economic, social and environmental well being of their communities and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK.

Community Halls (Grants)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what grants his Department has allocated to community halls for the cost of installing disabled toilets in each of the last three years; what funds his Department is making available in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [78425]

Mr. Raynsford: As far as I can ascertain, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has paid no grants specifically to Community Halls for the cost of installing disabled toilets in the last three years. We pay grants to local authorities, which have a power, but not a duty, to provide public toilets. Local authorities are subject to the Disability Discrimination Act.

Post Office Network

David Wright: To ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria will be used to define deprived areas in relation to the Post Office Urban Network Re-invention Programme. [78349]

Mr. McNulty: The "Indices of Deprivation 2000" will be used to define deprived areas in relation to both the Post Office Urban Network Re-invention Programme and the Post Office Fund for Urban deprived Areas.

The Indices of Deprivation 2000 are measures of deprivation for every ward and local authority area in England. It combines a number of indicators which cover a range of domains (Income, Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education, Skills and Training, Housing and Geographical Access to Services) into a single deprivation score for each area.

The deprivation criteria for the Post Office Urban Network Re-invention Programme relates only to the fact that other than in exceptional circumstances, the compensated closure arrangements will not extend to offices in the 10 per cent. most deprived urban areas, which are more than half a mile from the next post office.

The deprivation criteria for the Post Office Fund for Urban Deprived Areas will be announced shortly.

Home Safety

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what firm his Department has commissioned to gather data from individual householders about safety in the home; and if he will make a statement. [78909]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has commissioned several organisations to carry out such research on its behalf since it took on responsibility for fire matters in May 2002

The research projects undertaken relate to individual's or householder's attitudes or behaviour with regard to fire safety in the home and are as follows:

The Attitude and Behaviour monitor is quantitative research which has been carried out annually by Taylor Nelson Sofres for four years—the last tranche being December 2001, and The Older People qualitative research was carried out by Andrew Irving Associates this summer.

Additionally, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has commissioned the Home Office to provide fire safety data through the British Crime Survey. From 2001, the survey has been conducted by British Market Research Bureau. For the first few months, British Market Research Bureau were in consortium with IPSOS RSL.

Urban Summit

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much *(a)* money, *(b)* departmental time and *(c)* other resources the Government has expended on the Urban Summit. [79344]

Mr. McNulty: The final expenditure and income figures for the Urban Summit have yet to be determined. However, the net cost of staging the event, after taking account of income from ticket sales, exhibition stand sales and sponsorship is currently estimated at about £550,000. This figure includes the costs of contractors, consultants and agency staff recruited to work on the Summit organisation, but excludes the costs of permanent ODPM staff. The costs of the permanent ODPM staff in the Summit organising team are estimated at about £200,000.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which urban councils not controlled by the Labour Party were represented at the Urban Summit on 31st October to 1st November. [80308]

Mr. McNulty: All urban councils were invited to attend the Urban Summit, regardless of political control. An analysis of the delegate database is being carried out to provide the information requested. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information is available. A copy of my letter will be deposited in the House of commons Library.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which *(a)* district councillors and *(b)* officers from urban councils which are not controlled by the Labour Party were invited (i) to speak and (ii) to chair sessions at the Urban Summit of 31st October to 1st November. [80307]

Mr. McNulty: Taking all local authorities in England, one County Councillor and four officers either spoke at or chaired themed sessions at the Urban Summit from authorities which are not controlled by the Labour Party.

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* regeneration initiatives and *(b)* publications launched by his Department at the Urban Summit in Birmingham; what the cost was of holding the summit; how many registered attendees and media representatives were present; whether a sustainability audit was done of the summit venue in advance of the decision to use the international convention centre; and if he will make a statement on matters learned at the summit; and what his next actions will be in relation to urban regeneration. [80364]

Mr. McNulty: A number of initiatives and publications were launched at the Urban Summit in Birmingham on 31 October and 1 November 2002. These included:

an announcement that steps were being taken to ensure that future housing developments in the South East would be at over 30 homes per hectare;

publication of the report "Living Places—Cleaner, Safer, Greener" setting out the Government's vision for public space and its responses to the recommendations of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce;

the setting up of a new unit to champion public space under the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment;

publication of five reports, called "Partners in Urban Renaissance" bringing together work done over the last year in 24 towns and cities across England;

a partnership between the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships to work together on land assembly and delivering new homes;

the first annual review of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit entitled "Places, People, Prospects";

publication of "Cities, Regions and Competitiveness" the interim report of a working Group on the role of Core Cities in creating prosperous regions.

In relation to the cost of staging the Urban Summit I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave yesterday to the hon. right Member for Suffolk Coastal (Mr. Gummer).

Final checks are being made on delegate numbers but our records currently show that 1525 delegates registered and attended the Summit and 138 media representatives were present.

No formal sustainability audit was carried out but sustainability issues, such as the accessibility of the venue by public transport, were factors in the criteria for selecting the venue.

Debate on urban issues at the Summit took place not just in the plenary sessions, but also in 28 themed sessions. The key messages and ideas which came out of those sessions are being gathered together and will be fed into the development of the long term plan for sustainable communities which the Deputy Prime Minister will be presenting to the House in January 2003. A report on the Summit's proceedings will be deposited in the House of Commons library.

British-Irish Relations

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what dates Ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; where each Meeting took place; which ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72688]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister attended the British-Irish Council Summit held in Jersey on 14 June 2002. The Taioseach and other Irish Ministers were also present. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 20 June 2002, *Official Report* c.494W.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, how many planning appeals his Department has decided on mobile phone masts and base stations; and what the outcome of the appeals were in each of the last three years. [79043]

Mr. McNulty: The following information relates to appeal decisions about telecommunications development generally, as information is not held about appeal decisions for mobile phone masts and base stations specifically. However, I would estimate that a large proportion of the appeals were for mobile phone masts and base stations.

Year	*Appeals Recorded*	*Appeals Allowed*	*Appeals Dismissed*	*Appeals Withdrawn*
2000	379	201	119	59
2001	702	403	203	96
2002 (Jan-Oct)	446	283	137	26

Note:
All figures relate to the year in which the appeal was received, not necessarily the year it was decided

Starter Homes Initiative

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many applications have been approved under the Starter Homes Initiative since its introduction, broken down by local authority area. [79679]

Mr. McNulty: As at 31 October 2002, some 1240 key workers had purchased homes under the Starter Home Initiative who would otherwise have been unable to afford to do so. The table below, shows by local authority area in which they are employed and by key worker group, the number of key workers that have benefited so far through the Starter Home Initiative.

Local authority area in which key worker is employed	*Key worker group*	*Number of key workers that have purchased homes under the Initiative*
Round 1 funding[1]		
Ashford	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	4
Ashford	Teacher	2
Aylesbury Vale	Police	3
Aylesbury Vale	Teacher	3
Barking and Dagenham	Teacher	1
Barnet	Teacher	5
Basildon	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Basingstoke and Deane	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Bedford	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Bexley	Teacher	22
Bexley	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	14
Bournemouth	Teacher	5
Bournemouth	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Bracknell Forest	Police	2
Bracknell Forest	Teacher	5
Bracknell Forest	Teacher	3
Braintree	Teacher	10
Brent	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	9
Brighton and Hove	Other[3]	1
Brighton and Hove	Teacher	3
Brighton and Hove	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	6
Bristol	Teacher	3
Bristol	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	11
Bromley	Teacher	22
Bromley	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	11
Cambridge	Other	1
Cambridge	Police	3
Cambridge	Teacher	8
Cambridge	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	18
Camden	Teacher	9
Camden	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Canterbury	Teacher	2
Canterbury	Other	2
Cherwell	Police	2
Cherwell	Teacher	4
Cherwell	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	4
Chichester	Other	1
Chichester	Teacher	1
Chichester	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
Chiltern	Teacher	2
Chiltern	Teacher	1
Christchurch	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Cotswold	Teacher	2
Cotswold	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Crawley	Teacher	1
Crawley	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
Croydon	Teacher	23
Croydon	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	4
Dartford	Teacher	1
Dartford	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Ealing	Teacher	11
Ealing	Teacher	2
East Hampshire	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Eastbourne	Other	1
Eastbourne	Teacher	4
Eastbourne	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
Eastleigh	Police	2
Eastleigh	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Elmbridge	Police	1
Elmbridge	Teacher	7
Enfield	Teacher	1
Epsom and Ewell	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	4
Epsom and Ewell	Teacher	3
Gravesham	Teacher	1
Greenwich	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Greenwich	Teacher	19
Guildford	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	6
Guildford	Police	4
Guildford	Teacher	6
Hackney	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	16
Hackney	Teacher	2
Hammersmith and Fulham	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	33
Hammersmith and Fulham	Other	2
Hammersmith and Fulham	Police	2
Hammersmith and Fulham	Teacher	9
Haringey	Teacher	2
Harlow	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Harlow	Teacher	2
Harrow	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Harrow	Other	1
Harrow	Teacher	5
Hart	Teacher	6
Hastings	Other	1
Hastings	Teacher	1
Havant	Police	3
Havant	Teacher	3
Havering	Teacher	3
Hertsmere	Police	1
Hillingdon	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	7
Hillingdon	Teacher	10
Horsham	Teacher	4
Hounslow	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Hounslow	Teacher	10
Islington	Police	1
Kensington and Chelsea	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Kensington and Chelsea	Police	2
Kensington and Chelsea	Teacher	5
Kingston upon Thames	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Kingston upon Thames	Teacher	10
Lambeth	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	31
Lambeth	Teacher	9
Lewes	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
Lewisham	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	13
Lewisham	Police	3
Lewisham	Teacher	32
Maidstone	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	8
Maidstone	Teacher	2
Merton	Police	1
Merton	Teacher	8
Mid Sussex	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	4
Mid Sussex	Teacher	3
Mole Valley	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Mole Valley	Other	1
Newham	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	4
Newham	Teacher	19
North Hertfordshire	Teacher	1
Oxford	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	17
Oxford	Police	7
Oxford	Teacher	9
Reading	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	13
Reading	Other	4
Reading	Police	6
Reading	Teacher	5
Redbridge	Teacher	13
Reigate and Banstead	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	19
Reigate and Banstead	Other	4
Reigate and Banstead	Teacher	7
Richmond upon Thames	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2

Local authority area in which key worker is employed	Key worker group	Number of key workers that have purchased homes under the Initiative
Richmond upon Thames	Teacher	5
Rother	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
Rother	Teacher	1
Runnymede	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	15
Runnymede	Teacher	13
Rushmoor	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Rushmoor	Police	1
Rushmoor	Teacher	6
Slough	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
Slough	Police	3
Slough	Teacher	7
South Gloucestershire	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
South Gloucestershire	Teacher	4
South Oxfordshire	Other	1
South Oxfordshire	Police	4
South Oxfordshire	Teacher	8
Southampton	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	23
Southampton	Teacher	13
Southwark	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	22
Southwark	Teacher	23
Spelthorne	Other	3
Spelthorne	Teacher	8
St Albans	Other	1
St Albans	Police	1
St Albans	Teacher	1
Stevenage	Police	2
Stevenage	Teacher	1
Surrey Heath	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
Surrey Heath	Teacher	6
Sutton	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	5
Sutton	Teacher	17
Swindon	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	7
Swindon	Teacher	12
Tandridge	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Tandridge	Police	1
Tandridge	Teacher	3
Test Valley	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
Test Valley	Teacher	1
Tonbridge and Malling	Teacher	4
Tower Hamlets	Teacher	11
Tunbridge Wells	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	4
Tunbridge Wells	Teacher	3
Vale of White Horse	Teacher	2
Waltham Forest	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Waltham Forest	Teacher	11
Wandsworth	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	7
Wandsworth	Police	1
Wandsworth	Teacher	18
Watford	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	4
Watford	Police	6
Waverley	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	6
Waverley	Other	1
Waverley	Teacher	15
Wealden	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
Wealden	Police	1
Wealden	Teacher	1
Welwyn Hatfield	Police	2
Westminster	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	16
Westminster	Police	3
Westminster	Teacher	11
Winchester	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	10
Winchester	Police	3
Winchester	Teacher	53
Woking	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	2
Woking	Other	1
Woking	Teacher	9
Wokingham	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	3
Wokingham	Other	1
Wokingham	Police	4
Wokingham	Teacher	15
Wycombe	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	8
Wycombe	Teacher	3
	Sub-total Round 1	*1228*
Round 2 funding[2]		
East Hampshire	Police	3
Guildford	Teacher	1
North Hertfordshire	Teacher	1
Rugby	Teacher	1
Salisbury	Nurse/Hlth Wkr	1
The Medway Towns	Teacher	1
Three Rivers	Teacher	1
Thurrock	Teacher	1
Warwick	Teacher	2
Watford	Teacher	1
West Wiltshire	Teacher	2
	Sub-total Round 2	*15*
	Total Rounds 1 and 2	*1243*

Notes:

[1] Round 1 funding was allocated in September 2001

[2] Round 2 £10,000 equity loan scheme funding was allocated to help key workers in housing hot spots outside London in May 2002

[3] Other key workers being helped under the Initiative are social workers, care workers, fire fighters, transport workers and occupational therapists.

Regions

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what were the administrative costs of *(a)* regional development agencies, *(b)* government offices for the regions and *(c)* regional chambers, in each region, this year; what the projected costs are for the next financial year; and if he will make a statement. [79669]

Mr. Raynsford: The available estimates for 2002–03 are in the table below.

The figures for the voluntary regional chambers show only Government grant. The remainder of their costs is a matter for the chambers themselves.

Projected costs for 2003–04 are not available, except for voluntary regional chambers which will continue to have available Government grant of £600,000 each.

Regional	Regional Development Agency	Government Office	Voluntary Regional Chamber
North East	£16,722,000	£8,658,690	£600,000
North West	£19,921,000	£13,852,480	£600,000
Yorkshire & the Humber	£14,750,000	£9,520,690	£600,000
East Midlands	£10,467,000	£7,39[illegible]220	£600,000
West Midlands	£13,500,000	£9,213,410	£600,000
South West	£13,975,000	£9,418,630	£600,000
East of England	£7,245,000	£7,704,080	£600,000
South East	£12,839,000	£9,249,800	£600,000
London	£14,044,000	£12,215,670	n/a

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many written representations he has received in the last 12 months expressing support for elected regional assemblies; and if he will make a statement. [79668]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 389W.

Further to that reply, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has now received over 1,200 individual responses to the White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice*, which we published on 9 May. I will write to the hon. Member once our analysis of these responses has been completed. In the six months prior to the publication of the White Paper we also received a number of letters and other enquiries about the Government's policy on elected regional assemblies.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list each overseas visit undertaken by himself and his Ministers along with the cost of each trip. [79598]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1374–75W.

Fire Service

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many discussions ministers have held with *(a)* Sir George Bain and members and officers of the Bain Inquiry since September and *(b)* representatives of the Fire Brigades Union since January; what was discussed at each; when each took place; and who participated. [79588]

Mr. Raynsford: Ministers have had several discussions with Sir George Bain, and members and officers of the Independent Review of the Fire Service (IRFS); and with representatives of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). Subjects discussed included the working arrangements of the IRFS; the progress of negotiations on the FBU pay claim and the availability of striking members of the FBU in the case of a life-threatening emergency. Discussions have involved a variety of participants, including Ministers and senior officials.

Ms Walley: To ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the commencement date of each review undertaken in respect of the Fire Service; and in each case, whether *(a)* the findings have been published and *(b)* they have been placed in the Library. [79402]

Mr. McNulty: The Tables below set out the reviews of aspects of the fire service in England and Wales which have been started since May 1997. They do not include research projects. On 5 September the Government announced an Independent Review of the Fire Service under the Chairmanship of Professor Sir George Bain. The Independent Review is in progress.

Review	*Review commenced*	*Findings published*	*In Library*
Inquiry into the Machinery for Determining Firefighters' Conditions of Service	October 1999	March 2000	Cmd 4699
Fire Pensions Review	1994	Consultation Document March 1998	Yes
Fire Cover Review	June 1998	Report to be considered at next meeting of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council.	No
The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications	Announced October 1999	Summary of report circulated May 2000	Yes

In addition Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate have undertaken the following thematic reviews of aspects of the Fire Service.

Thematic Review	*Review commenced*	*Findings published*	*In Library*
Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service	November 1998	September 1999	Yes
Fit for Duty	March 1999	February 2000	Yes
Making a Difference	July 1999	November 2000	Yes
Reducing False Alarms	July 1999	March 2001	Yes
Bridging the Gap	September 1999	May 2001	Yes

I will ensure that copies of those reports that are not already in the Library are placed there in due course.

Homelessness

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* homeless priority acceptances, *(b)* people living in temporary accommodation, *(c)* people living in bed-and-breakfast accomodation and *(d)* children living in homeless households there were in each year since January 1977, broken down by region. [79676]

Mrs. Roche: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information is available.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the number of homeless *(a)* individuals and *(b)* families accommodated in (i) bed and breakfast and (ii) hostels in each London borough; and what advice he is giving borough council's on the use of such facilities. [79659]

Mrs. Roche: The following numbers of homeless families are reported to have been in bed and breakfast and hostel accommodation as at 30 June 2002:

	B&B			*Hostel*	
	Families	*Individuals*	*Total*	*Families*	*Individuals*	*Total*
Barking & Dagenham	15	23	38	n/a	n/a	36
Barnet	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bexley	19	23	42	17	6	23
Brent	444	112	556	31	22	53
Bromley	77	61	138	75	16	91
Camden	85	83	168	266	156	422
City	2	6	8	0	0	0

	B&B			Hostel	
	Families	*Individuals*	*Total*	*Families*	*Individuals*	*Total*
Croydon	337	198	535	5	0	5
Ealing	470	223	693	107	47	161
Enfield	149	79	228	18	47	161
Greenwich	20	46	66	56	26	82
Hackney	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hammersmith & Fulham	320	271	591	128	12	141
Havering	0	0	0	48	24	72
Hillingdon	n/a	n/a	486	59	55	114
Hounslow	n/a	n/a	346	n/a	n/a	171
Islington	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kensington & Chelsea	n/a	n/a	383	n/a	n/a	38
Kingston upon Thames	5	7	12	32	65	97
Lambeth	233	218	451	162	139	301
Lewisham	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	339
Merton	37	22	59	39	14	53
Newham	n/a	n/a	845	n/a	n/a	51
Redbridge	n/a	n/a	272	n/a	n/a	41
Richmond upon Thames	20	28	48	50	18	68
Southwark	107	138	245	119	163	282
Sutton	40	23	63	10	25	35
Tower Hamlets	151	171	322	13	4	17
Waltham Forest	26	11	37	70	18	88
Wandsworth	2	436	438	0	139	139
Westminster	n/a	n/a	840	0	0	0
Total	2,576	2,184	7,932	1,347	1,021	3,044

The Government have committed that by March 2004, local authorities will ensure that no homeless family with children will be in bed and breakfast hotels other than in an emergency and even then for no more than 6 weeks. Advice to local authorities on the use of accommodation for homeless individuals and families is contained in the Homelessness Code of Guidance which was issued jointly by my Department and the Department of Health in July 2002.

The figures referred relate to individuals and families who are statutory homeless i.e. the number of applications to local authorities.

Ministerial Discussions

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many discussions Ministers have held with *(a)* councillors, *(b)* devolved Administrations and *(c)* the Mayor of London since May; what subjects were discussed at each; when they took place; and who participated. [79589]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministers from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have regular meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals, including Councillors, members of the Devolved Adminstrations and the Mayor of London. As with previous Administrations it is not practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Housing Stock

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many dwellings were transferred under large scale stock transfers in each year since 1997, broken down by local authority area; and if he will make a statement. [79678]

Mr. McNulty: The table below lists those local authorities that have undertaken large scale voluntary transfers since 1997 and the number of dwellings transferred in each transfer.

List of all Large Scale Voluntary Transfers which have taken place since 1997

Date of Transfer	*Authority*	*No. of Dwellings*	*Annual Total*
28–02–1997	COTSWOLD DC	4,282	
07–03–1997	SOUTH STAFFS C	5,273	
19–03–1997	LICHFIELD DC	4,921	
07–07–1997	SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DC	5,018	
22–09–1997	EDEN C	1,510	21,004
05–01–1998	LB LAMBETH* Moorlands	515	
09–02–1998	LB BEXLEY	4,118	
09–02–1998	LB BEXLEY	4,097	
02–03–1998	CONGLETON BC	4,061	
09–03–1998	OLDHAM BC* Limehurst	642	
19–03–1998	LIVERPOOL CC* Windermere	493	
23–03–1998	LB MERTON* Pollards Hill	1,018	
23–03–1998	LB TOWER HAMLETS* Poplar I	1,852	
23–03–1998	KERRIER DC	3,732	
30–03–1998	LB HACKNEY* Kingsmead	951	
30–03–1998	LB BRENT* Fortunegate/ Church End	1,481	
30–03–1998	BASILDON DC* Vange	708	
30–03–1998	WEST SOMERSET DC	1,869	
31–03–1998	STOKE-ON-TRENT CC* Bentilee	917	
27–04–1998	TEWKESBURY BC	3,066	
01–05–1998	ROTHER DC	3,058	
20–07–1998	LB LAMBETH* Lansdowne Green	681	
07–12–1998	LB TOWER HAMLETS* Poplar II	2,431	
25–01–1999	WIRRAL* Leasowe	1,082	35,690
01–02–1999	TAMESIDE* West Ashton	901	
22–02–1999	WEST DEVON BC	1,446	
01–03–1999	SOUTH SOMERSET DC	8,883	
01–03–1999	EAST LINDSEY DC	5,102	
05–03–1999	LIVERPOOL CC* Pinehurst	646	
08–03–1999	MANCHESTER CC	1,030	
15–03–1999	LB HACKNEY* Morningside	1,084	
22–03–1999	SOUTH HAMS DISTRICT COUNCIL	3,090	
17–03–1999	LB HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM* Old Oak	668	
22–03–1999	LB HACKNEY* Upper Clapton	1,000	
25–03–1999	TELFORD AND WREKIN C	13,081	
29–03–1999	LB ENFIELD	1,194	
29–03–1999	WORTHING BC	2,525	
29–03–1999	BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET C	9,887	
	MANCHESTER CC* East		

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List of all Large Scale Voluntary Transfers which have taken place since 1997

Date of Transfer	Authority	No. of Dwellings	Annual Total
29-03-1999	Wythenshawe	6,667	
29-03-1999	LB GREENWICH* Charlton Triangle	1,280	
29-03-1999	LB HACKNEY* Haggerston	661	
31-03-1999	ALLERDALE BC	3,704	
31-03-1999	ALLERDALE BC* Salterbeck	727	
14-06-1999	PRESTON BC* Avenham	1,121	
05-07-1999	LB LAMBETH* Central Stockwell	2,358	
21-06-1999	BIRMINGHAM CC* Central Areas	2,813	
26-09-1999	LB ISLINGTON* Barnsbury	647	
26-09-1999	LB ISLINGTON* Ten Estates	739	
04-10-1999	LIVERPOOL CC* Speke Garston	4,382	
18-10-1999	WEST LINDSEY DC	3,929	
25-10-1999	LB LAMBETH* St. Martins	1,033	
29-11-1999	BOSTON BC	4,871	
20-12-1999	TYNEDALE DC	3,564	89,039
31-01-2000	NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME BC	9,887	
07-02-2000	RESTORMEL BC	3,577	
14-02-2000	MANCHESTER CC (COLSHAW FARM)	600	
21-02-2000	NORTH DEVON DC	3,293	
06-03-2000	LB HACKNEY* Stamford Hill	1,095	
06-03-2000	LB HACKNEY* Pembury Estate	1,241	
08-03-2000	BURNLEY BC	5,330	
20-03-2000	MANCHESTER CC Sale Estate	1,655	
20-03-2000	WEYMOUTH AND PORTLAND C	3,105	
20-03-2000	HUNTINGDON DC	6,650	
27-03-2000	ELMBRIDGE BC	4,894	
27-03-2000	TEST VALLEY BC	5,495	
27-03-2000	WYRE FOREST DC	6,056	
27-03-2000	MANCHESTER CC Whitefield Estate	1,033	
27-03-2000	LB TOWER HAMLETS* THCH	1,551	
27-03-2000	TAMESIDE MBC	8,532 7,934	
17-07-2000	LB RICHMOND	7,139	
22-09-2000	COVENTRY CC	20,125	
02-10-2000	FYLDE BC	1,905	
27-11-2000	CHESTER CC	7,096	
11-12-2000	HORSHAM DC	4,650	112,843
12-02-2001	LB TOWER HAMLETS	196	
19-02-2001	EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE DC	3,495	
19-02-2001	TORBAY C	2,947	
23-02-2001	STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DC	3,132	
06-03-2001	CALDERDALE MBC	12,759	
13-03-2001	CHICHESTER DC	5,321	
19-03-2001	MENDIP DC	4,370	
26-03-2001	WEST WILTSHIRE DC	3,284	
26-03-2001	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DC	3,643	
26-03-2001	EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BC	5,637	
26-03-2001	MANCHESTER CC Handforth Estate	659	
26-03-2001	SUNDERLAND CC	36,356	
28-03-2001	BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BC	9,886	
01-10-2001	SHREWSBURY & ATCHAM BC	5,500	
05-11-2001	MID-BEDFORDSHIRE DC	3,084	100,225
04-03-2002	DERBYSHIRE DALES	3,287	
11-03-2002	CHELMSFORD BC	6,902	
18-03-2002	EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DC	2,687 3,237	
25-03-2002	EREWASH BC	5,847	
25-03-2002	REIGATE & BANSTEAD BC	4,846	
24-06-2002	St EDMUNDSBURY	5,947	
01-07-2002	VALE ROYAL BC	6,813	
01-07-2002	St HELENS MBC	14,632	
15-07-2002	REDCAR & CLEVELAND BC	11,625	
15-07-2002	KNOWSLEY MBC	17,090	
30-09-2002	LB WALTHAM FOREST	2,574	
14-10-2002	LB HACKNEY cc sheltered stock	954	
14-10-2002	LB HARROW	518	86,959
Total Number of Dwellings that have been transferred since 1997			445,760

Note:
* indicated the transfer was an Estates Renewal Challenge Fund scheme

Affordable Housing

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much affordable housing there was in each region in England and Wales in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [79682]

Mr. McNulty: The available information in respect of housing provided by local authorities and registered social landlords is presented below.

Social Landlord dwelling stock in England and Wales as at 31 March

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Registered Social Landlords					
North East	47	48	49	53	89
North West	153	159	178	213	225
Yorkshire & The Humber	67	70	73	75	89
East Midlands	48	51	58	69	74
West Midlands	102	114	130	150	179
East	97	101	105	114	117
London	205	220	240	252	271
South East	186	197	206	218	234
South West	85	89	123	134	146
Wales	48	50	52	54	55
Local Authorities					
North East	298	292	286	276	233
North West	523	509	485	445	416
Yorkshire & The Humber	441	434	427	419	397
East Midlands	293	289	280	265	257
West Midlands	410	402	381	354	316
East	302	295	290	277	271
London	621	596	575	553	532
South East	288	278	268	252	234
South West	224	214	184	170	156
Wales	204	201	197	193	188
All social landlords					
North East	345	341	335	329	323
North West	676	668	663	658	641
Yorkshire & The Humber	508	504	500	494	486
East Midlands	341	340	338	334	331
West Midlands	512	516	512	504	495
East	399	396	394	391	388
London	826	816	815	805	803
South East	474	475	474	471	468
South West	308	303	307	304	302
Wales	252	251	249	247	243

Information about the number of affordable housing units built without any form of public funding is not collected centrally.

Social Housing

Alan Simpson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, how many respondents to the Consultation Paper on a Decency Standard for Social Housing supported the view that the proposed minimum standards required under the Thermal Comfort criteria were sufficiently rigorous; and how many took the opposing view. [79501]

Mr. McNulty: The Consultation Paper on refining the detail of the thermal comfort criterion of a decent home proposed two options:

(a) retaining the fuel poverty measure; and

(b) moving to a stock measure of thermal comfort which would require a dwelling to have both effective insulation and efficient heating.

Of the 140 respondents to the consultation:

46% favoured moving to the proposed stock measure,

26% favoured moving to a stock measure but stated that they felt the standard proposed was too low,

25% rejected both proposals—many of these respondents suggested SAP although there was little consensus on what constituted an appropriate level; and 3% favoured the retention of fuel poverty as the measure.

Following the consultation a number of refinements were made to the definition of efficient heating and effective insulation before publishing the revised guidance. The main change was the requirement for higher levels of insulation in dwellings with electric storage heaters, programmable solid fuel or LPG central heating.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many successful asylum applicants were subsequently housed in social housing in each Government Office region in each year since 1999. [79716]

Mr. McNulty: The Government do not collect information relating to the number of former asylum seekers granted refugee status or exceptional leave to remain who are housed in social housing.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many of those recognised as refugees and granted indefinite leave to remain or exceptional leave to remain were later accepted as being owed a duty by a local authority under the Homelessness Act 2002 in each Government Office region in each year since 1999. [79715]

Mr. McNulty: The Government do not collect information about the number of persons granted refugee status or exceptional leave to remain who are allocated housing accommodation by local housing authorities under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, or allocated accommodation by registered social landlords. Nor does the Government collect information specifically about the number of persons granted refugee status or exceptional leave to remain who are accepted as owed a duty by a local housing authority under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).

However, data about households accepted as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, and whose last settled home were accommodation provided by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), has been collected from local housing authorities on the quarterly housing activity return (Form PIE) since April 2002. The degree of response and the quality of data received varied widely and the data we hold for the April to June 2002 quarter are not considered reliable. Information for the July to September 2002 quarter will be available in December 2002. These data do not, however, identify refugees and persons granted exceptional leave to remain who were not accommodated by NASS.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which of his Department's Public Service Agreements relate to fuel poverty reduction; and what progress has been made to date in achieving them. [79502]

Mr. McNulty: The Public Service Agreement to bring all social housing up to a decent standard and to increase the proportion of vulnerable households in the private sector who live in homes that are in decent condition by 2010 will contribute to a reduction in fuel poverty. To be classed as decent, a home must provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort by providing efficient heating and effective insulation, measures which will make homes cheaper to heat.

On the social sector side of the target, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is on track to meet its interim target of tackling a third of the worst social housing by 2004 and is working to ensure it meets the target by reviewing all policies that contribute to the delivery of decent social housing to ensure they are as effective as possible and provide value for money.

For the private sector side of the target, officials are in the process of drawing up a delivery plan with colleagues in DEFRA responsible for the home energy efficiency scheme. The plan will set out in detail how the target will be delivered and include the steps that will be taken to ensure the contributing policies and procedures are working together as efficiently as possible.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the number of fuel-poor households who occupy dwellings that meet the Thermal Comfort criteria of the Decent Homes Standard; and how many households in this sector will remain fuel poor after all social housing complies with the standard. [75904]

Mr. McNulty: We will not have up-to-date figures of the numbers of fuel poor households living in decent homes until we complete the relevant parts of the analysis of the 2001 English House Condition Survey, in early 2003. This work will be undertaken jointly between ODPM, DEFRA and DTI.

To estimate the numbers of households who will be living in fuel poor households after all social housing is brought up to a decent standard in 2010 requires a number of assumptions about influencing factors such as energy prices and incomes. We are not able to provide a robust estimate of these factors at this time.

Right to Buy

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what information he has collated on the number of council dwellings sold under right-to-buy in each of the past five years in each London borough; and the number

of new dwellings constructed by RSL or councils; and how many he expects to be constructed in 2002–03 and 2003–04. [79609]

Mr. McNulty: The available information on right to buy sales and new build in London is presented in the tables below:

Local Authority district	Reported activity in 1997–98 (n/r indicates not reported) Sales under Right to Buy Local Authority months n/r	Estimated activity in 1997–98 New dwellings completed Local Authority	Registered Social Landlord	Total Social Landlords	Reported activity in 1998–99 (n/r indicates not reported) Sales under Right to Buy Local Authority months n/r	Estimated activity in 1998–99 New dwellings completed Local Authority	Registered Social Landlord	Total Social Landlords
Barking and Dagenham	433	2	12	14	393	0	8	8
Barnet	195	0	178	178	260	0	80	80
Bexley	183	0	48	48	0	0	19	19
Brent	214	0	1	1	184	0	30	30
Bromley	0	0	33	33	0	0	28	28
Camden	514	0	172	172	505	0	85	85
City of London	26	0	0	0	58	0	0	0
Croydon	164	0	362	362	156	0	221	221
Ealing	205	0	12	12	218	0	121	121
Enfield	172	0	51	51	163	0	152	152
Greenwich	392	0	226	226	373	0	197	197
Hackney	222	34	549	583	337	0	251	251
Hammersmith and Fulham	141	0	74	74	189	0	22	22
Haringey	262	0	131	131	284	0	63	63
Harrow	85	0	66	66	97	0	5	5
Havering	183	0	39	39	209	0	25	25
Hillingdon	226	2	293	295	287	35	165	200
Hounslow	192	0	38	38	290	0	21	21
Islington	339	0	0	0	393	0	65	65
Kensington and Chelsea	103	0	0	0	95	0	41	41
Kingston upon Thames	65	0	22	22	55	0	2	2
Lambeth	387	0	286	286	454	0	168	168
Lewisham	365	0	345	345	524	0	167	167
Merton	120	0	39	39	173	0	128	128
Newham	286	0	103	103	300	0	180	180
Redbridge	61	0	22	22	85	0	5	5
Richmond upon Thames	86	0	6	6	92	0	8	8
Southwark	344	14	130	144	418	0	70	70
Sutton	141	0	32	32	124	0	19	19
Tower Hamlets	465	0	172	172	641	0	59	59
Waltham Forest	192	0	743	743	190	0	643	643
Wandsworth	240	0	33	33	267	0	37	37
Westminster	164	0	111	111	239	0	113	113

Note:
Statistics on Right to Buy include some rent to mortgage sales.

Local Authority district	Reported activity in 1999–00 (n/r indicates not reported) Sales under Right to Buy Local Authority months n/r	Estimated activity in 1999–00 New dwellings completed Local Authority	Registered Social Landlord	Total Social Landlords	Reported activity in 2000–01 (n/r indicates not reported) Sales under Right to Buy Local Authority months n/r	Estimated activity in 2000–01 New dwellings completed Local Authority	Registered Social Landlord	Total Social Landlords
Barking and Dagenham	762	0	18	18	527 3	0	80	80
Barnet	287	0	98	98	252	0	168	168
Bexley	0	0	27	27	0	0	98	98
Brent	265	0	1	1	156 3	0	251	251
Bromley	0	0	97	97	0	0	33	33
Camden	560	0	166	166	760	0	290	290
City of London	81	0	21	21	50	0	0	0
Croydon	181	0	194	194	249	0	77	77
Ealing	354	0	125	125	330	0	88	88
Enfield	327	0	84	84	216	0	344	344
Greenwich	515	0	64	64	518	0	147	147
Hackney	493	0	235	235	764	0	134	134
Hammersmith and Fulham	240	0	23	23	380	0	0	0
Haringey	442	0	85	85	239 6	0	86	86
Harrow	134	0	3	3	88	0	0	0
Havering	307	0	47	47	273	0	28	28
Hillingdon	266	0	142	142	231	79	294	373
Hounslow	335	0	0	0	283	0	24	24
Islington	325 3	0	27	27	n/r 12	0	44	44
Kensington and Chelsea	147	0	20	20	108	0	55	55
Kingston upon Thames	98	0	45	45	51	0	44	44
Lambeth	644	0	173	173	669 3	0	266	266
Lewisham	634	0	93	93	n/r 12	0	151	151
Merton	177	0	149	149	164 3	0	51	51
Newham	430	0	120	120	272 6	0	133	133

Local Authority district	Reported activity in 1999–00 (n/r indicates not reported) Sales under Right to Buy Local Authority	months n/r	Estimated activity in 1999–00 New dwellings completed Local Authority	Registered Social Landlord	Total Social Landlords	Reported activity in 2000–01 (n/r indicates not reported) Sales under Right to Buy Local Authority	months n/r	Estimated activity in 2000–01 New dwellings completed Local Authority	Registered Social Landlord	Total Social Landlords
Redbridge	108		0	39	39	129		0	39	39
Richmond upon Thames	225		0	30	30	33	6	0	20	20
Southwark	643		0	15	15	809		0	26	26
Sutton	214		0	122	122	146		0	172	172
Tower Hamlets	815		0	202	202	1074		0	132	132
Waltham Forest	289		0	186	186	244		79	517	596
Wandsworth	514		0	76	76	323		0	3	3
Westminster	391		0	207	207	440		0	367	367

Note:
Statistics on Right to Buy include some rent to mortgage sales.

Local Authority district	Reported activity in 2001–02 (n/r indicates not reported) Sales under Right to Buy Local Authority	months n/r	Estimated activity in 2001–02 New dwellings completed Local Authority	Registered Social Landlord	Total Social Landlords
Barking and Dagenham	374	3	20	57	77
Barnet	168		0	72	72
Bexley	0	3	0	27	27
Brent	159		0	294	294
Bromley	0	6	0	9	9
Camden	671		0	30	30
City of London	39		0	0	0
Croydon	259		0	114	114
Ealing	309		0	89	89
Enfield	210		0	312	312
Greenwich	470		0	72	72
Hackney	373	3	5	396	401
Hammersmith and Fulham	221		0	0	0
Haringey	n/r	12	0	160	160
Harrow	71	3	0	8	8
Havering	219		0	137	137
Hillingdon	163		0	182	182
Hounslow	142	3	0	87	87
Islington	844		5	0	5
Kensington and Chelsea	42		0	11	11
Kingston upon Thames	32		0	4	4
Lambeth	n/r	12	0	364	364
Lewisham	n/r	12	0	264	264
Merton	165		0	81	81
Newham	461	3	0	160	160
Redbridge	101		0	12	12
Richmond upon Thames	0	6	0	28	28
Southwark	930		0	22	22
Sutton	125		0	83	83
Tower Hamlets	1007		0	415	415
Waltham Forest	188		22	61	83
Wandsworth	149	3	0	0	0
Westminster	207		0	243	243

Ministers set the Housing Corporation a target to complete a minimum of 21,000 dwellings in England in 2002–03. The Corporation's Investment Bulletin, published in April 2002, forecast that approximately 5,200 of these units would be in London.

The bidding round for the 2003–04 approved development programme (ADP) is now in progress. The Housing Corporation's Investment Bulletin for 2003–04 will be published early next year.

Special Advisers

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the special advisers serving in his Department, and their salary bands; and if he will make a statement. [79605]

Mr. Leslie: There are three special advisers serving in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—Joan Hammell, Ian McKenzie and Paul Hackett. For details of paybands occupied by special advisers I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 24 July, Official Report, Hansard, column 1372W.

Housing Fitness Standards

Alan Simpson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what the timescale is for the full implementation of the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System; and what mechanisms exist to ensure compliance with its requirements. [79503]

Mr. McNulty: We intend to legislate to replace the current housing fitness standard with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System at the earliest opportunity. We will ensure that appropriate mechanisms exist for compliance with the new regime.

Land Ownership (Public Authorities)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment has been made by his Department of the total development land owned by public authorities in each London borough; and what advice he gives on its disposal. [79630]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister collects information about previously developed land, distinguishing between that in the ownership of the private sector, local authorities and other public sector bodies, and the borough in which it is located. ODPM published National Land Use Database—Previously Developed Land (NLUD-PDL) data for 2001 on 12th September 2002 and this is available at www.odpm.gov.uk, including a Supplementary Table on "Previously developed land that is unused or may be available for redevelopment by land type and Planning Authority: England 2001".

Guidance on disposals includes chapter 24 of "Government Accounting 2000", available at www.government-accounting.gov.uk.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans his Department has to decentralise non-departmental public bodies that are affiliated to his Department and devolve their responsibilities to local authorities. [79667]

Mr. Raynsford: There are currently no plans to decentralise the work of Non-Departmental Public Bodies to local authorities. The Housing Corporation has long had regional offices.

In the case of the four Housing Action Trusts, the relevant local authority is represented on each board by 1–3 Councillors and tenants have the right to choose the Council or a Registered Social Landlord as their future landlord.

We also plan to introduce new arrangements to strengthen links, at regional level between housing, planning and economic development strategies. These arrangements include the introduction of a single regional pot for resources for housing investment.

Parliamentary Questions/Correspondence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to him from hon. Members in this session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79942]

Mr. Leslie: *(a)* As at today, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no Parliamentary Questions outstanding.

(b) The Cabinet Office publishes a report to Parliament on an annual basis, setting out the volume of Members' correspondence received by departments. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May, [Col. 677w]. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

Following the recent machinery of government changes and the creation of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 29 May 2002 I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information on correspondence is collated.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to bring forward legislation to ensure that homes in multiple occupation meet satisfactory standards, with particular reference to energy efficiency. [80007]

Mr. McNulty: The Government are committed to raising standards in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and we intend to introduce legislation to achieve this as soon as a legislative slot is available. Our proposed measures will include a requirement for local authorities in England & Wales to licence those HMOs in their areas that pose the greatest risk to the health and safety of their occupiers. Underpinning the licensing regime and applying to all residential properties will be a new risk assessment based approach to housing conditions, which will replace the current prescriptive standards, and enable local authorities to target those HMOs with the worst housing conditions, including energy efficiency standards.

Council Rents

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what estimate he has made of the cumulative additional rent paid in real terms over the 10 years rent restructuring period by council tenants in London in *(a)* money terms at 2002–03 prices and *(b)* as a percentage of the Housing Revenue Account rent income for 2001–02 at 2002–03 prices, assuming that (i) there is no change in the number of council tenants over the period, (ii) councils move to the average of the formula rents proposed by his Office and (iii) they do so in the roughly equal steps proposed by his Office, (1) taking the impact of individual tenants' rent increase capping into account and (2) not taking the impact into account; [79862]

(2) what estimate he has made of the average real terms increase in rents paid by council tenants in London in *(a)* money terms at 2002–03 prices and *(b)* percentage terms compared to 2002–03 prices at the end of the 10 year rent restructuring period, assuming (i) that there is no change in the number of council tenants over the period and (ii) that councils move to the average of the formula rents as proposed by his Office, *1* taking the impact of individual tenants' rent increase capping into account and *2* not taking the impact into account. [79858]

Mr. McNulty: Setting of council tenants' rents remains a matter for individual local authorities. Future council rent levels will be influenced by, among other things, the outcome of future Spending Reviews.

However, were London boroughs to follow our policy on rent restructuring, we estimate that on current assumptions the average rent paid by council tenants in London in 2011–12 at the end of the ten year rent restructuring period, would be £8.17 higher in real terms in 2002–2003 prices. This represents a real increase of 12.8 per cent., as a percentage of the Housing Revenue Account rental income of London boroughs for 2001–2002 in today's prices.

The estimated cumulative additional average rent paid each year in real terms over the ten years is shown in the following table in 2002–2003 prices.

Year	*Real rent increase*	*Percentage increase over today's average rent*
2002–2003	£0.82	1.3%
2003–2004	£1.63	2.6%
2004–2005	£2.6%	3.8%
2005–2006	£3.27	5.1%
2006–2007	£4.09	6.4%

Year	Real rent increase	Percentage increase over today's average rent
2007–2008	£4.90	7.7%
2008–2009	£5.72	8.9%
2009–2010	£6.54	10.2%
2010–2011	£7.35	11.5%
2011–2012	£8.17	12.8%

Notes:
1. These figures do not make any allowance for the impact of future Right To Buy sales or transfers to Registered Social Landlords.
2. As relevant data is currently unavailable, these estimates do not take account of the effects of the rent caps and limits on individual rent rises, which will have the effect of reducing this average rise.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what plans he has to ensure that the proceeds of the increased rents in real terms paid by council tenants in London over successive years as a result of rent restructuring will be available for *(a)* the better resourcing of services to council tenants' homes and *(b)* investment in those homes. [79861]

Mr. McNulty: The resources to be made available to local authorities for housing will be a matter for future Spending Reviews.

The ring fencing of the Housing Revenue Account ensures that rental and other revenue income relating to council dwellings must be spent on matters relating to those dwellings. Within that ring fence, it is a matter for individual local authorities to decide how to prioritise spending in order to provide a better service to council tenants and to ensure the necessary investment in their homes.

Agricultural Buildings (Rates)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the benefit accruing to agriculture from the exemption of agricultural buildings from payment of local rates. [79261]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Agricultural land and buildings are exempt from rating under Schedule 5 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. As a result, the Valuation Office Agency, whose responsibility it is to compile and maintain an accurate rating list, makes no assessment of the values of such properties and therefore there is no reliable basis on which to make an estimate.

Decent Homes

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what estimate he has made at 2002–03 prices of *(a)* the national total and *(b)* totals broken down by Government Office region for the investment required to (i) meet the Decent Homes Standard for council tenants' homes and (ii) clear the backlog of housing investment in council tenants' homes, broken down into *(A)* repairs and *(B)* improvements. [79864]

Mr. McNulty: We estimate that at April 2001 there was a backlog of capital works in the council housing sector totalling about £20 billion at 2002 prices—£10.5 billion for repairs and £9.5 billion for improvements. About £16.5 billion of this relates to works within the decent home standard and £3.5 billion for works outside the standard (eg environment improvements, security works etc).

These estimates are based on the 1996 English House Condition Survey, rolled forward to give a 2001 position. Regional estimates of the total backlog, based on applying the regional distribution from local authority Housing Revenue Account Business Plans to this national total, are given in the table.

GO Region	Estimated Backlog at 2001 (2002 Prices) Cost (£mn)	% of Total
North East	1,300	6%
North West	3,100	16%
Yorkshire and the Humber	2,700	14%
East Midlands	1,200	6%
West Midlands	2,500	12%
East of England	1,100	5%
London	6,100	31%
South East	1,200	6%
South West	900	5%
England total	£20,000	100%

Note:
Components may not sum to total due to rounding

The 2001 English House Condition Survey will provide more up-to-date estimates early in the New Year.

Housing Receipts

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will set out for each year from 1997–98, and including estimates for 2002–03, *(a)* the totals of set-aside housing receipts and *(b)* the totals of housing basic credits approvals, broken down by Government Office region; [79863]

(2) what the national total of *(a)* set-aside housing receipts and *(b)* housing basic credit approvals was in each year from 1997–98; and what these figures are estimated to be in 2002–03. [79859]

Mr. McNulty: *(a)* The total of set-aside housing receipts in England in £thousands was:

	2001–02	2000–01	1999–2000	1998–99	1997–98
North East	48,118	175,552	71,998	37,608	46,470
Yorkshire & Humber	107,662	84,721	76,174	57,732	64,675
East Midlands	120,856	74,441	122,541	84,556	54,721
East	213,366	118,771	160,950	98,758	106,412
London	411,002	423,441	343,059	220,531	239,621
South East	123,936	246,904	245,199	146,451	160,849
South West	64,378	109,344	127,067	199,148	94,088

	2001–02	2000–01	1999–2000	1998–99	1997–98
West Midlands	158,187	185,573	168,061	150,684	84,033
North West	114,497	206,833	162,130	89,143	91,706
National Total	1,362,002	1,625,580	1,477,180	1,084,610	942,575

Note:
The estimated national total for 2002–03 is £2.5bn. No estimates are made of the figure by Government Office region.

(b) The amount in £thousands, for England, of Housing Annual Capital Guidelines (credit approvals plus the allowance (£199 million in recent years) made for capital funded from authorities' useable receipts) was:

	2002–2003	2001–2002	2000–2001	1999–2000	1998–1999	1997–1998
North East	47,036	43,756	130,369	77,332	73,707	49,811
Yorkshire & Humber	77,015	70,826	201,255	117,701	109,207	77,516
East Midlands	61,273	58,095	140,758	73,359	69,393	48,967
East of England	61,066	55,381	142,372	82,762	79,803	56,144
London	322,163	309,722	601,712	353,945	329,377	247,426
South East	92,752	85,582	175,966	107,193	100,143	75,764
South West	54,920	52,163	113,525	69,120	67,746	50,127
West Midlands	99,533	95,559	227,451	125,165	121,444	87,069
North West	128,997	111,389	285,195	172,427	162,272	109,822
National Total	944,756	882,473	2,018,603	1,179,004	1,113,092	802,646

These figures include the separate Capital Receipts Initiative funding provided in 1997–98 to 1999–2000.

The reductions between 2000–01 and 2001–02 reflects the switch of funds into the new Major Repairs Allowance, paid as part of housing subsidy, to fund capital works to maintain council housing.

Revenue Grant Distribution

Ann Winterton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many representations he has received from residents of *(a)* Cheshire and *(b)* Congleton constituency registering their response to his Department's review of revenue grant distribution; when he expects to announce his decision following his Department's consultation; and if he will make a statement. [80003]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) on 5 November 2002, *Official Report*.

Shropshire Waste Plan

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the objectors to sites SA 22 and 23 in the Shropshire Waste Plan produced by Shropshire County Council; and if he will place copies of the objections in the Library. [79993]

Mr. McNulty: There were 97 objectors to Policy SA 22 and 90 objectors to Policy SA 23 of the Deposit Draft of the Shropshire Waste Local Plan 2002–2014. It is the responsibility of Shropshire County Council to consider these objections and to take the plan through all its stages. Information on the objectors and the details of each objection are not held in Government. Shropshire County Council intend to place all the objections to this Waste Local Plan on their website, www.shropshire-cc.gov.uk. In the meantime, they can be viewed by prior appointment at the Community and Environment Department; Shropshire County Council, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury (Telephone: 01743 252595).

Renewable Energy

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the steps which he is taking to promote building integrated renewables, with special reference to solar thermal and solar photovoltaics in new housing developments through the planning process. [79792]

Mr. McNulty: We will be issuing a draft Planning Policy Statement note on Renewable Energy and Planning for consultation at the turn of the year. This updated PPS revises PPG22. It will include guidance on including integrated renewables in developments such as housing. Also, through our planning policies for housing we encourage local authorities to adopt policies which promote the energy efficiency of new housing where possible.

Seaside and Country Homes Scheme

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 283W, on the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme, if he will commission research into *(a)* the capacity of seaside and country areas in South East England for an expansion of the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme and *(b)* the likely popularity and take up of the Scheme. [80090]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is leading in the procurement of a new service to improve mobility, especially labour mobility for social housing tenants, throughout the UK. As part of the procurement of this service (currently going under the working name HEMS—Housing and Employment Mobility Services) the operation and extent of the Seaside and Country Homes scheme is being reviewed. We expect to award the HEMS contract in March 2003 and for delivery of the new service to begin in July 2003.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will place in the Library the location of the dwellings used under the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme. [80091]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

County	*Location*	*Bung.*	*Flat*	*Total by County*
Berkshire	Lambourne	27		27
Cambridgeshire	March	32		32
Cornwall	Illogan	45		
	Perranporth		40	85
Devon	Exmouth	31		
	Plymstock	38		69
Dorset	Burton	35		
	Gillingham	40		
	Christchurch	42		
	Poole		22	
	Swanage		24	163
Essex	Brightlingsea	40		
	Burnham on Crouch	40		
	Clacton	24	8	
	Clacton on Sea	39		
	Dovercourt	82	40	
	Elmstead Market	26		
	Frinton	34		
	Great Clacton	51		
	Holland on Sea	18		
	St Osyth	86		
	Walton on the Naze	68		556
Gloucestershire	Winchcombe	39		39
Hampshire	Blackfield	18		
	Botley	44		
	Emsworth		32	
	Lee on Solent	40		
	Lordswood	40		
	New Milton		16	
	Ringwood		26	
	West End	42		258
Isle of Wight	Cowes		17	
	Newport	50		
	Ryde		24	
	Wootton	40	6	137
Kent	Birchington	12		
	Canterbury	30		
	Deal	38		
	Faversham	36		
	Folkestone	48	47	
	Herne Bay	14	41	
	Margate	48		
	Ramsgate	54	12	
	Walmer	82		
	Westgate on Sea		22	484
Lincolnshire	Skegness	80		80
Norfolk	Cromer		32	
	Diss	24	12	
	Gorleston		22	
	Hunstanton	41		
	North Walsham	41		172
Shropshire	Shrewsbury	34		34
Somerset	Bridgwater	32		
	Highbridge	58		
	Minehead	67		
	Taunton	40		
	Weston Super Mare		41	
	Worle	40		255
Suffolk	Beccles	20	6	
	Felixstowe		29	
	Lowestoft	35	35	
	Oulton Broad		36	
	Stowmarket	40		201
Sussex	Angmering	35		
	Bognor Regis	40	8	
	Bracklesham Bay		28	
	Brighton		48	
	East Preston		34	
	Hailsham		12	
	Hastings		41	
	Littlehampton	38	38	
	Peacehaven		36	
	Rustington		22	
	Saltdean		10	
	Selsey	13	10	
	Telscombe Cliffs		26	
	Worthing	24	102	565
Wiltshire	Warminster	38		
	Westbury	40		78
Grand Total		2253	1005	1258

Housing (Overcrowding)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what legislation is in force relating to overcrowding standards in housing; and when each provision came into force. [80092]

Mr. McNulty: The current overcrowding standards are set out in Part X of the Housing Act 1985. The Room Standard is breached if two people of opposite sexes who are not living together as husband and wife must sleep in the same room. The Space Standard specifies the number of people who may sleep in a dwelling according to the number of rooms and their floor area. Both standards must be met. The 1985 Act is a consolidating Act. The standards were carried forward from the Housing Act 1957, which itself consolidates those which had originated in the Housing Act 1935.

In respect of houses in multiple occupation, local authorities also have powers under section 358 of the 1985 Act to serve an overcrowding notice where they are satisfied that there are, or there may become, an excessive number of people living in a property having regard to the number of rooms available. Such notice must specify the number of people who can occupy the property. Contravention of the notice is a criminal offence.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 284W, on overcrowding, if it is his policy *(a)* to end the practice of counting living rooms as rooms available to sleep in, *(b)* to end the practice of not counting babies under the age of one and *(c)* to lower the age at which males and females should no longer be expected to have to sleep in the same room for the purposes of determining overcrowding. [80093]

Mr. McNulty: We are considering whether overcrowding is best tackled through a modern set of standards—updating the present legislative framework—or through the new Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), which we hope to introduce as a replacement for the housing fitness standard when Parliamentary time allows. It will be possible to assess and tackle hazards from crowding and

space under HHSRS, but we would need to be satisfied that the problem is one that can be dealt with through this process alone.

Local Authority Finance

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of spending by *(a)* Hampshire County Council, *(b)* Fareham Borough Council, *(c)* English county councils and *(d)* English district councils is to be financed by council tax payers in 2002–03. [80303]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities budgeted to finance the following percentages of revenue expenditure from the council tax in the year 2002–03:

	Income from council tax as a percentage (%) of spending
Hampshire County Council	33
Fareham Borough Council	41
English County Councils	32
English District Councils	40

Source:
2002–03 Budget Estimate (RA) Return

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what public consultations have been commenced by his Department in each month since 10 September; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80279]

Mr. Leslie: Full details and the texts of public consultation exercises launched by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister since 10 September 2002 are set out on our website (www.odpm.gov.uk) in the section entitled "What's New".

Supporting People Programme

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the impact of the introduction of Supporting People; and whether a community care assessment will be required for residents living in a leasehold sheltered housing scheme in order for its Department to meet the costs of its scheme manager and allied arrangements attributed as "having related support" as part of their income support. [80019]

Mr. McNulty: The Supporting People programme, which will be operational from 1 April 2003, will improve the quality of housing related support services for vulnerable people. It will provide an integrated policy and funding framework for the comprehensive review of support needs in a local area and for planning how those needs will be met.

Those leaseholders in sheltered housing schemes who currently receive Income Support need to obtain a community care assessment in order for the costs of support to continue to be met. After 1 April, these costs will be paid from the Supporting People grant. Those people who receive Income Support and who move into leasehold housing schemes after 1 April will not need a community care assessment in order to receive Supporting People money. Local authorities are currently mapping providers of support services and, after 1 April, leaseholders will be eligible for Supporting People money if they receive Income Support and are living in a scheme that has been mapped by local authorities as providing support services.

Guidance on how the Supporting People programme will apply to leaseholders was published in September and is available on the Supporting People knowledge web at: http://www.spkweb.org.uk/search/search—docdisplay.asp?doc—id = 10996

Urban Regeneration

Mr. Flight: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to encourage urban regeneration. [80381]

Mr. McNulty: The Government's policies for urban regeneration were set out in the Urban White Paper "*Our Towns and Cities: the Future—Delivering an urban renaissance*" which was published in November 2000. Significant achievements have been made since then. My right Hon. Friend hosted an Urban Summit in Birmingham on 31 October and 1 November to review progress and identify what more needs to be done. Key messages from the Summit will be fed into the long term plan for sustainable communities which the Deputy Prime Minister will announce to the House in January 2003.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many of the recommendations by Lord Rogers of Riverside's Urban Task Force have been implemented. [80380]

Mr. McNulty: The Government have endorsed the principles behind all of the recommendations in Lord Roger's report and in the majority of cases have accepted them in full or in part. Our response to each recommendation was set out in the Annexe to the Urban White Paper "*Our Towns and Cities: the Future—Delivering an urban renaissance*" which was published in November 2000. Significant progress has been made in delivering the measures laid out in the Urban White Paper. An Implementation Plan is available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website.

Fly Tipping

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the cost of fly tipping to local authorities in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* England and Wales in each of the last five years. [78084]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply

The Government do not hold any central data on the cost of fly tipping to local authorities. However, the Institute of Public Finance has produced a report entitled "Waste Collection and Disposal Statistics 2000–01 Actuals". The report states that in 2000–01, fly tipping resulted in costs to the waste collection authorities of £3,859,000 in the London Boroughs, £1,178,000 in the Metropolitan Districts and £3,941,000 in the Non Metropolitan Districts.

This report is available on the internet at: http://www.ipf.co.uk/sis/environmental/wastemanagement/2000–01/commentary.pdf.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Moscow Theatre Siege

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to establish whether the gas used by the Russian Government to end the Moscow theatre siege contained neuro-paralytic agents. [78567]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 4 November 2002.

EU Documents (Security)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions there have been breaches of security with respect to security covered EU documents in the last three years. [78123]

Mr. Macshane: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Consular Assistance (Tourist Resorts)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many requests have been received for consular assistance during the last 12 months in *(a)* Tenerife, *(b)* Corfu, *(c)* Majorca, *(d)* Benidorm, *(e)* Malaga and *(f)* Ibiza; how many of these were as a result of UK visitors being arrested by the police; and, of those arrested, how many have led to court appearances. [76309]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The number of registered requests requiring consular assistance during the last 12 months are set out below. However, some consular work involves providing various types of routine information to British nationals. These requests are not always recorded.

Consular Assistance Requests Oct 2001—Sept 2002

	Consular Assistance	*Detentions*	*Notes*
a) Tenerife	4000	303	The Consulate receives more than 10,000 visitors per year.
b) Corfu	1100	48	The Consulate receives more than 3,300 calls per year.
c) Majorca	1800	197	
d) Alicante	1100	302	The Consulate receives 6,000 written enquiries each year.
Benidorm does not keep separate statistics: requests for assistance are channelled through the Consulate in Alicante, which requests the assistance of the Honorary Vice-Consul in Benidorm as required.			
e) Malaga	1150	240	The Consulate receives 27,000 written enquiries each year.
Figures for Malaga include Cadiz, Seville and Granada.			
f) Ibiza	3000	135	The Consulate receives 3,000 written enquiries each year.

We do not keep statistics on court appearances.

European Commission

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those cases over the past 10 years where a staff member of the European Commission has been suspended; on what grounds; and what was the nature of the final settlement of the case. [78302]

Mr. MacShane: We have requested this information from the Commission. I will write to the hon. Member with a full reply as soon as this is received.

Departmental Staff (Ethnic Minorities)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to increase the level of representations of black and Asian people in his Department. [78866]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The FCO is determined to increase the level of representation of ethnic minorities. But there is no "quick fix" without using positive discrimination, which is unlawful. We continue to seek and attract high calibre candidates from all sectors of the community. We use targeted marketing techniques to advertise career opportunities as widely as possible and encourage applications from black and Asian people. Our objective is to ensure that 10 per cent. of recruits to the Diplomatic Service are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Encouragingly, in 2002 we exceeded this target. 15 per cent. of new entrants at policy level were from black and Asian backgrounds.

(Over-50s) Recruitment

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of new recruits to his Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79302]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The percentage of new recruits to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the past two years aged 50 and over is as follows;

1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 – 9.3 per cent.

1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 – 10.5 per cent.

Deaths (UK Nationals)

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many deaths of UK nationals have been notified to his Department *(a)* in Greece and *(b)* the island of Rhodes in the last 12 months. [78993]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There were a total of 116 deaths of UK nationals in Greece that were notified to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the last 12 months. Sixteen of those deaths were reported from the Island of Rhodes.

Burma (International Aid)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has collated regarding the Thai authorities' destruction of international aid destined for persecuted

groups in Burma; and if he will make a statement concerning the Government's response to this situation. [79006]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not been shown any evidence of destruction by the Thai authorities of international aid destined for persecuted groups in Burma.

Singapore

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Singapore regarding the imprisonment of the leader of the Singapore Democratic Party, Dr. Chee Soon Juan. [79012]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: None. Dr. Chee was imprisoned for failure to pay a fine imposed by the Singapore Courts in connection with an offence under the Public Entertainment Act.

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has held with the Government of Singapore regarding freedom of speech and human rights issues. [79011]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We raise these issues with the Singaporean authorities whenever the opportunity arises. The former Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), did so during his visit to Singapore in May this year.

Child Access

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases of prevention of access to children of British Nationals living in Germany have been reported to each of the British consulates in Germany in the last five years; and in what proportion of these cases the problems have been solved. [79519]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: During the last five years, twenty three British parents have contacted our Consulates in Germany about difficulties in securing access to children in Germany where the other parent has custody. Of these cases, we are aware that: two have been resolved; in fifteen cases the parents have had no further contact with the Consulate, so we are not aware of progress; six are ongoing and the relevant post in Germany continues to monitor the case.

Western Sahara

Albert Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination; and what steps it is taking to ensure Morocco does not obstruct the United Nations Security Council Resolutions. [79521]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* The British Government support a just and durable outcome to the Western Sahara dispute. We support the position of the Secretary General and his Personal Envoy, James Baker, to find a just and lasting solution to the situation in Western Sahara. The United Nations Secretary General noted in his report to the Security Council on Western Sahara on 19 February 2002 that

> "Despite their assertions to the contrary, the parties have not been willing to fully cooperate with the United Nations either to implement the settlement plan or to negotiate a political solution that will bring about an early, durable and agreed resolution of their dispute over Western Sahara".

On this basis we have called on both parties to the dispute—Morocco, the Polisario Front and Algeria—to show flexibility in the search for a long term solution, which at this point seems stalled by their mutually exclusive objectives.

Export Licences

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what definition of internal repression is used in considering applications for export licences. [79755]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All export licence applications are assessed on a case by case basis against the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria announced by my right hon. Friend for the Member Neath (Mr. Hain) on 26 October 2000, *Official Report*, 199–203. Criterion 2 of the Consolidated criteria sets out the Government's definition of internal repression as:

> "Internal repression includes, inter alia, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment; summary, arbitrary or extra-judicial executions; disappearances; arbitrary detentions; and other major suppression or violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms as set out in relevant international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what definition of internal repression is used in considering applications for export licences. [79844]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to the hon. Member for Carmarthen, East and Dinefwr (Adam Price) today (UIN 79755).

European Union

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how United Kingdom citizens may obtain copies of the draft report of the Convention on the future of Europe; and what steps he is taking to publicise the document. [79965]

Mr. MacShane: The Convention has not produced an overall draft report at this stage. But all the Convention's documents are available to the public on the Convention's Website (http://european-convention.eu.int). This includes Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's preliminary draft constitutional treaty, as well as the final recommendations of those Working Groups that have concluded their work.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy towards qualified majority voting for deciding when national parliaments should be allowed to vote on EU proposals. [79935]

Mr. MacShane: The Convention Working Group on Subsidiarity has proposed the creation of a new mechanism to enable national parliaments to monitor compliance with subsidiarity. The full text is available on the Convention's website (http://european-convention.eu.int).

This Government supports the Working Group's conclusions. We believe that national parliaments should review each new Commission legislative proposal. If a majority of national parliaments judged that a proposal infringed subsidiarity, the Commission should be required to re-examine its approach.

Ministerial Meeting (Indian Foreign Minister)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with Mr. Yashwant Sinha, the Indian Foreign Minister. [79927]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Yashwant Sinha, the Indian Foreign Minister, in London on 31 October. They discussed a wide range of bilateral and international issues. They agreed that the bilateral relationship is in excellent shape, and reiterated our joint commitment to developing further cooperation in line with the provisions of the New Delhi Declaration signed by the two Prime Ministers in January. The Foreign Secretary also reiterated the UK's support for India's permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary welcomed the recent successful Jammu and Kashmir elections and discussed with Mr. Sinha how tensions in the region could be further reduced.

North Korea

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions the United Kingdom has made through the EU to the North Korean light water nuclear reactor programme; and whether the United Kingdom was represented at the foundation laying ceremony in August. [79928]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The light water reactor project, established under the 1994 Agreed Framework, forms part of a package of measures introduced to bring DPRK into line with its international obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The UK contributions, made through the European Atomic Energy Commission, amount to a total of £10.64 million (up to the end of Financial year 2001–02. This year's contribution has not yet been made).

The European Commission represented all EU Member States at the foundation laying ceremony.

Ascension Island

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on democratic development on Ascension Island. [80105]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The residents of Ascension Island voted overwhelmingly in August this year to establish an Island Council. This was a key step towards a democratic system of government, the first in the island's history. The election of Councillors took place on 1 November, and has resulted in a broad cross-section of the island's population being represented on the Island Council. We hope that the Island Council will work closely with the Administrator and the Governor for the long-term benefit of Ascension Island.

Sudan

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the application for an export licence for the supply of two de-mining vests to the United Nations Office for Project Services in Sudan.

Mr. Rammell: The Government recently approved an application for a licence to export two de-mining vests for the United Nations Office for Project Services in Sudan. Although the demining vests are on the Military List, they will be used to open roads and increase the cost effectiveness of the UN relief operation which is working to alleviate the suffering in Sudan. This decision does not affect the Government's continued support for the EU common position on arms exports to Sudan.

Council of the European Union

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for November and major European Union events for the period from 30 November to May 2003. [80107]

Mr. MacShane: The information is as follows:

NOVEMBER 2002		
4	Brussels	Culture Council
5	Brussels	ECOFIN
6	Brussels	Meeting of the Prasidium
7	Brussels	Health Council
7–8	Brussels	Convention Plenary
11	Brussels	EU—Russia Summit
11–12	Brussels	Education, Youth & Culture Council
14–15	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumer Affairs & Tourism Council
18–19	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations council (+ Defence)
21	Brussels	Meeting of the Prasidium
21–22	Brussels	Aarhus—Informal Sports Ministers
25–26	Brussels	Budget Meeting
25–26	Brussels	Industry & Energy Council
28	Brussels	Meeting of the Prasidium
28–29	Brussels	Justice & home Affairs & Civil protection Council
29–30	Copenhagen	Enhanced European Co-operation (Ministerial)
DECEMBER		
2	Brussels	Meeting On Macro Economic Dialogue (Ministerial Troika)
3	Brussels	ECOFIN
2–3	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
4	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
5	Brussels	Transport & Telecom Council
6	Brussels	Transport & Telecom Council
9	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10	Brussels	Environment Council
12–15	Copenhagen	European Council
16–17	Brussels	Fisheries Council

19	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
20	Brussels	Justice And Home Affairs & Civil Protection Council
20–21	Brussels	Convention Plenary-External Action and Defence working group conclusions
JANUARY		
9	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
9	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council (to be confirmed)
16	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
20	Brussels	EUROGROUP (evening)
20	Brussels	Convention Plenary
20–21	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
21	Brussels	ECOFIN
24	Nafplion	Employment Council (Ministerial Informal)
27–28	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council
28	Brussels	EU-ASEAN Ministerial
30	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
FEBRUARY		
5	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
6–7	Brussels	Convention Plenary
10–11	Brussels	AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES Council (to be confirmed)
13	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
17	Brussels	EUROGROUP (evening)
18	Brussels	ECOFIN
20	Brussels	EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE Council (to be confirmed)
22	Thessaloniki	Energy Council (Ministerial Informal)
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council Agriculture & Fisheries
26	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
27–28	Brussels	Convention Plenary
27–28	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs Council
28	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
MARCH		
1–2	Ioannina	Informal Education
3	Brussels	Competitiveness Council
4	Brussels	Environment Council
6	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
6	Luxembourg	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
6	Luxembourg	EUROGROUP (evening)
7	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
7	Luxembourg	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
13	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
14–15	Athens	(Informal Defence Meeting)
17–18	Brussels	Convention Plenary
17–18	Luxembourg	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
18–19	Luxembourg	General Affairs & External Relations Council
21	Brussels	European Council
27	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
27	Veria	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Ministerial Informal)
27–28	Luxembourg	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council)
28	Athens	EU-Rio Group, EU-MERCOSUR
28–29	Veria	Informal Justice & Home Affairs (Veria)
31	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council (to be confirmed)
APRIL		
2	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
3–4	Brussels	Convention Plenary
4	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs
4–6	Hania (Crete)	Informal ECOFIN (Ministerial)
5	Lisbon	Europe—Africa Summit
5	Ioannina	Ministerial Meeting on Education (Informal)
10	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
11–13	Chania	ECOFIN (Informal)
14	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
14	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries
16	Athens	European Conference
16	Athens	Signature Of The Accession (Provisional Date)
23	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
24–25	Brussels	Convention Plenary
MAY		
2–4	(Greece)	Gymnich (Informal Foreign Ministers)
5	Athens	Informal Environment (Ministerial)
5–6	Brussels	Education, Youth & Culture Council (To be confirmed)
8	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
12–13	Brussels	Informal Agriculture (Ministerial)
12	Brussels	EUROGRUP
13	Brussels	ECOFIN
14	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
14	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
15–16	Brussels	Convention Plenary
16	Brussels	EU—ACP Ministerial
16–17	Halkidiki	Informal Regional Policy (Ministerial)
16–18	Athens (Cruise)	Informal Transport & Merchant Marine (Ministerial)
17	Brussels	EU—W. Balkans (Zagreb Process)
19	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations (+ Defence)
20	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
22	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
24	Thessaloniki	Informal Culture (Ministerial)
26–27	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
26–27	Athens	EUROMED Conference (Mid Term Ministerial)
27	Brussels	Environment Council
28	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
30–31	Brussels	Convention Plenary
31	St. Petersburg	EU—Russia Summit

Malaysia

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Malaysia concerning the operation of the Internal Security Act and its compliance with international legal norms; and if he will make a statement. [79648]

Mike O'Brien: EU Heads of Diplomatic Missions in Kuala Lumpur raised this issue with the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Syed Hamid, on 17 May 2001. We also regularly express our concerns about the use of the Internal Security Act with the Malaysian High Commission in London.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations have been made to the Government of Malaysia concerning the imprisonment of the former Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim; and if he will make a statement. [79647]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our views on Anwar Ibrahim's continuing imprisonment were expressed in an EU statement of 12 July 2002. That statement recalled our deep concern about the fairness of the trial and expressed disappointment that the verdict had been upheld on final appeal. Our High Commissioner has also discussed this issue with Malaysian ministers.

National Missile Defence

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings have been held with the US Deparments of *(a)*

State and *(b)* Defense on the United Kingdom's contribution to national missile defence; and if he will make a statement. [79651]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Missile defence issues are discussed regularly in the course of official UK/US contacts. It remains the case that there has been no formal US request for the use of UK facilities for missile defence purposes. If a request is received, the Government will consider it. But the Government would only agree to use of UK facilities if satisfied that the overall security of the UK and NATO would be enhanced.

Bermuda

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he has taken to ensure that the Boundary Commission in Bermuda has properly discharged its duty to invite representations from the public relating to proposals to change Bermuda's electoral system. [79867]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Constituency Boundaries Commission invited the public to express views and attend meetings through widely advertised notices in the press and on the radio in Bermuda. Everyone had an opportunity to attend. Meetings were held in four different places, including the capital Hamilton.

Sikhs

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations have been received by Her Majesty's Government from the Indian Government concerning the separate ethnic monitoring of British Sikhs in the United Kingdom. [80367]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have not received any representations from the Indian Government regarding the separate ethnic monitoring of British Sikhs.

Zimbabwe

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the sale by the wife of the Zimbabwe National Army Commander, of crops seized from Chakoma Estates in Goromonji to United Kingdom supermarkets; and if he will make a statement. [80061]

Mr. Rammell: Mrs. Chiwenga's involvement with Chakoma Estates has been reported in both the UK and Zimbabwe media. We have no additional information about the sale of the company's produce to UK supermarkets.

Anglo-French Summit

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) which country first proposed an Anglo-French Summit to take place in the last three months of this year; [79963]

(2) when a place for an Anglo-French summit in the last three months of this year was agreed; [79962]

(3) when and by whom it was suggested that an Anglo-French summit scheduled to take place in the last three months of this year should be postponed or cancelled; and if he will make a statement on current arrangements on the summit. [79961]

Mr. MacShane: UK-French Summits have taken place roughly annually for over 25 years. The venue alternates between UK and France. It was France's turn to host this year and consequently for them to propose a date. They originally proposed 3 December, but have since postponed to allow more time for preparation. We look forward to receiving a new date.

UK Consulates (California)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact on the *(a)* diplomatic and *(b)* business role of the United Kingdom Consulates in California on the creation of five separate regional development agency offices in that state. [79921]

Mr. Rammell: There have been no formal assessments of the impact on the Consulates in California of the local Regional Development Agency (RDA) offices. However, if an RDA wishes to open a new (or expand an existing) overseas office, it is required to present a business case for prior approval by my noble Friend the Baroness Symons, and by the Consulate General.

Although the RDAs have no diplomatic remit, their presence can strengthen the FCO's public diplomacy effort, for example, when issues arise concerning a particular area of the UK (e.g. Northern Ireland).

Our Consulates in California have a good relationship with the RDAs, and integrate their business activities where practicable. To ensure there is no "double handling", the inward investment activity of the RDAs is regulated by the Committee on Overseas Promotion Guidelines, which require them to notify the relevant Post in advance before visiting companies within the Post's area of responsibility.

Charter of Fundamental Rights

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to make the Charter of Fundamental Rights enforceable in law. [78869]

Mr. MacShane: The Charter is a political declaration. The Government strongly supports it. People need to know their rights and the EU institutions need to respect them.

The Government has always maintained that there are legal and practical problems linked to giving the text as its stands legal status. The Laeken European Council mandated the participants in the Future of Europe Convention to consider the Charter's status. We have worked hard in the Convention's Charter Working Group to find solutions to the issues of legal certainty that would need to be resolved before the UK could consider a change in the Charter's status.

In looking at the Charter's status, two key aspects of the existing text must be maintained: that the Charter is addressed to the Institutions and the Member States only to the extent they are implementing Union law; and

that the Charter creates no new power or tasks for the EC and does not modify powers or tasks defined by the Treaties.

The Government welcomes the Working Group's final report, including some of the technical amendments the group recommends, as a basis for further work on the Charter's status. Any decision on the future status of the Charter will be taken by Heads of Government at an IGC.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

European Scrutiny

Miss McIntosh: To ask the President of the Council, what plans he has to bring forward proposals to give further powers to Select Committees to take evidence on matters relating to European policy and European draft legislative proposals; and if he will make a statement. [80384]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Lady to the Government's Observations on the Thirtieth Report of the European Scrutiny Committee 2001–02, European Scrutiny in the Commons (Second Special Report of that Committee 2001–02, HC 1256), particularly paragraphs 6 and 34–36. Select Committees have power already to take evidence on matters relating to European policy and European draft legislative proposals; and the Liaison Committee's recent guidance to select committees on core objectives and tasks specifically asks them to examine policy proposals from the European Commission.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Disability Living Allowance

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people with autism and Asperger's Syndrome applied for disability living allowance in 2001; how many were *(a)* successful in their application and *(b)* refused; and how many of those who were refused were later awarded disability living allowance on appeal. [77283]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is not available but such information we can give is shown in the table:

Number of new recipients of Disability Living Allowance with main disabling condition as learning difficulties or severely mentally impaired between November 2000 and November 2001

Thousands

	Learning Difficulties	*Severely mentally impaired*
Great Britain	13.7	0.1*

Notes:

1. Figures are in thousands and rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures marked* are under 500 and therefore are subject to a high degree of sampling variation and should only be used as a guide to the current situation.
3. We do not have autism listed as a disability, therefore, figures for people with Kanner type autism are most likely to be classed under severely mentally impaired, and people with Asperger's Syndrome could be classified under learning difficulties, although these figures will also include other people.
4. New recipients figures are people in receipt of DLA at November 2001 but not November 2000, there will be a small additional number of new recipients in the year to November 2001 whose DLA award had ceased before 30 November 2001. Therefore, they will not have been present on either our November 2000 or 2001 extract.

Source:

Figures taken from the AA/DLA computer system as at 30 November each year sample.

Private Pensions

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions he has had with *(a)* the pensions industry *(b)* employers and *(c)* trades unions to ensure that the public is better informed about their future pension provisions. [75031]

Mr. McCartney *[holding reply 21 October 2002]:* The Government are committed to ensuring that individuals have access to better information to improve awareness of the importance of retirement planning. We have discussed these issues with a range of pensions representative organisations; such as the members of the Joint Working Group on Occupational Pensions and the Financial Services Authority, as part of our regular dialogue on pensions issues. We have a pension education strategy which includes:

Raising awareness of retirement planning through a dedicated publicity campaign;

Providing more information to people about their pension provision through combined pension forecasts; and

Testing new ways to get information out to the public, for example through interactive digital television.

Following the Prime Minister's statement at the TUC conference, Ministers have met with both the TUC and the CBI to discuss a range of pensions issues and officials are continuing the constructive dialogue. In addition, the Department of Work and Pensions liasies with a range of organisations on an ongoing basis, to consider ways to improve the provision of pensions information to consumers. For example, in relation to the work on the combined pension forecast we have worked closely with a range of employers such as Sainsburys and Prudential.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many final salary pension scheme closures there were over the last five years. [79767]

Mr. McCartney: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with the information requested and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

HSE Inspections

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the impact of the recent change in the annual number of Health and Safety Executive inspections. [80244]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There was a fall in the number of preventive inspections between 1996–97 to 2001–02 from 116,652 to 75,237. Over the same period, there was a 35 per cent increase in the number of investigations.

Investigations take much longer than inspections and so it is inevitable that more investigations mean fewer inspections. HSE has also taken action to increase their other preventive work including seminars, conferences and awareness days.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the level of investigations by the Health and Safety Executive into deaths and major injuries of *(a)* the public and *(b)* workers. [80242]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The data are not available in the format requested. However, incidents that meet HSE's incident selection criteria are investigated; the criteria are in the public domain and were agreed only after thorough consultation with all interested parties.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the levels of prosecution following investigation by the Health and Safety Executive into deaths and major injuries of *(a)* the public and *(b)* workers. [80245]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The data are not available in the format requested.

However, all the Health and Safety Executive's decisions about taking enforcement action are made in accordance with the principles contained in the Health and Safety Commission's Enforcement Policy Statement (EPS).

In addition, the HSE has to ensure that proposed enforcement action meets the requirements of the Code for Crown Prosecutors in England and Wales, and the Prosecutors Code in Scotland. These require that there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of obtaining a conviction, and that any proposed prosecution would be in the public interest.

Dr. Cable (Twickenham): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many accidents were *(a)* reported to and *(b)* investigated by the Field Operations division of the HSE in (i) 1998 99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01 and (iv) 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [75131]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The following table shows the number of injuries to employees, self-employed people and members of the public as reported to HSE's Field Operations Directorate and the total number of incidents investigated, 1998–99/2001–02.

Year	*Injuries Reported*	*Incidents Investigated*
1998–1999	141,549	7,805
1999–2000	141,507	9,754
2000–2001	138,312	14,279

Notes:

1. "Injuries" includes all fatal, major and over-3-day injuries.
2. Injuries reported as required by the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 1995.
3. "Incidents" includes injuries, diseases, dangerous occurrences and gas safety incidents.

The data for investigations are not available in the form requested. The data for 2001–02 are not available as the information is subject to exemption 10 under the National Statistics Code of Practice pending the publication of HSE Statistics in December 2002

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to increase the proportion of *(a)* dangerous occurrences and *(b)* major injuries investigated by the Health and Safety Executive; [80241]

(2)What assessment he has made of the reasons underlying differences between Health and Safety Executive areas in the level of *(a)* investigation, *(b)* inspection and *(c)* prosecution. [80243]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether housing benefit will continue to be paid four weeks in arrears in the housing benefit reform pilot areas. [80257]

Malcolm Wicks: Yes.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will place in the Library a copy of the report made to him on housing benefit at Swale Borough Council. [79920]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) on 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, cols 136-38W.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how he will indentify those vulnerable people he intends to safeguard in the housing benefit reform pilot areas; and what form these safeguards will take. [80262]

Malcolm Wicks: Tenants in the pilot areas will have their rent paid to them rather than to their landlord. However, we appreciate that not all tenants will be able to cope with this responsibility. For this reason safeguards will be in place to ensure that landlords and vulnerable tenants are protected.

For example, as now, where it is considered appropriate, the pathfinder authority will be able to make the first payment of benefit direct to the landlord. And in cases where 8 weeks' rent arrears have built up, payments of Housing Benefit will be made to the landlord. In addition, certain groups of vulnerable tenants—such as those living in hostels—will not be included in the standard local housing allowance scheme.

The details of the new scheme will be set out in regulations and we shall be consulting on these in due course.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how mobility within and between neighbourhoods of differing housing quality and cost will be monitored in the housing benefit reform pilot areas; whether the pre-1996 housing benefit restrictions

are being repealed in the housing benefit reform pilot areas; and how much he estimates the gainers in the housing benefit reform pilot areas will benefit; [80253]

(2) how he plans to measure the impact on the supply of quality housing in the housing benefit reform pilot areas; [80260]

(3) how he plans to monitor if rent is being negotiated in the housing benefit pilot areas; and if he will monitor the effectiveness of *(a)* the elderly, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* ethnic minority groups and *(d)* people with disabilities in such negotiations; [80261]

(4) if he will review the effect of the operation of non-dependent deductions in the housing benefit reform pilot areas; [80258]

(5) whether the number and size of localities used to determine local reference rents and standard local housing allowances in the housing benefit reform pilot areas will be monitored following the Rent Offices (Housing Benefit Functions) (Amendment) Order 2001. [80252]

Malcolm Wicks: The standard local housing allowance will repeal the pre-1996 Housing Benefit restrictions in pathfinder local authority areas. The benefits to the gainers in the pathfinder areas will depend on the local conditions in those authorities that volunteer to become pathfinders.

In consultation with independent researchers we are drawing up a rigorous evaluation strategy to monitor the standard local housing allowance pathfinders.

The evaluation strategy will use a range of research techniques, including both fieldwork with key stakeholders in the pathfinder areas and analysis of administrative and operational data collected by the Department. This will enable us to understand both the impact of the pathfinders and the way in which these impacts have been achieved.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people are receiving housing benefit in respect of private sector tenancies, *(a)* in Great Britain and *(b)* each of the smallest geographical units for which figures are available; [76799]

(2) when the reference rent scheme was introduced; and how many private sector tenants in receipt of housing benefit have been affected by it in each year since it was introduced; [76801]

(3) how many private sector tenants in receipt of housing benefit whose eligible rent is capped by the reference rent are *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* couples with children, *(c)* childless couples, *(d)* lone parents and *(e)* other single people; [76802]

(4) what proportion of private tenants in receipt of housing benefit have their eligible rent capped by the reference rent system in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* in each of the smallest geographical units for which figures are available. [76800]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There are limits and complexities to the available data. I will write to the hon. Member shortly with more detail and place a copy of my letter in the Library

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have had their housing benefit restricted to below the level of rent payable as a result of the local reference rent; and how many of those people have only one room for their exclusive use in each of the last five years. [79479]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There are limits and complexities to the available data. I will write to the hon. Member shortly with more detail and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of Swale borough council's housing benefit procedures on homelessness in Sittingbourne and Sheppey. [79919]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) has an ongoing programme of inspections to help councils identify and act on weaknesses in their benefit services, and drive up standards of administration. On 25 September the BFI published a report of an inspection of Swale Borough Council conducted in spring 2002. The report commended Swale for clearing its backlog of benefit claims since the previous BFI inspection in 2000, and for improvements in the council's speed in processing benefit claims.

Although it made further recommendations to help the council address ongoing weaknesses, we recognise the detrimental effect that delays in processing Housing Benefit claims can have on the ability of tenants to meet their rent responsibilities. That is why a key aim of our strategy for reforming Housing Benefit is to improve its administration.

However there is no evidence to show a direct link between poor benefit administration and homelessness.

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people in receipt of housing benefit in the private sector in Wandsworth have to make up the difference between the amount received and the rent stated in their claim. [77290]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested.

The table shows the number, the average weekly Housing Benefit payment and the average eligible rent of Housing Benefit recipients living in the deregulated private sector, in the London Borough of Wandsworth, at May 2002. There is no directly comparable information about the actual rents paid by Housing Benefit recipients.

Local Authority	*Housing Benefit Recipients*	*Average Weekly Eligible Rent*	*Average Weekly Amount Of Housing Benefit Paid*
Wandsworth	2,050	£136.00	£128.20

Notes:

1. The data refer to households claiming Housing Benefit, which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.

2. The eligible rent is the amount of rent, which may be met by Housing Benefit after any restrictions applied by the rent officer, taking account of the cost of suitable accommodation in the area.
3. Figures include cases where Housing Benefit is paid at a reduced rate due to the tenant's income.
4. The caseload figure is rounded to the nearest ten cases.
5. The average amounts are rounded to the nearest ten pence.
6. Figures exclude any extended payment cases

Source:
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information Quarterly 100 per cent. statistical enquiry taken in May 2002.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of gainers in the housing benefit reform pilot areas are likely to benefit from the removal of housing benefit restrictions other than the local and single reference rents. [80259]

Malcolm Wicks: The proportions for individual pathfinder areas will depend on which local authorities agree to take part in the pilot.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what reasons underlay his decision on the length of the period before landlords can begin receiving housing benefit directly if a tenant gets into arrears; and what assessment he has made of the impact of his decision on possession cases in shorthold tenancies. [80255]

Malcolm Wicks: The requirement that housing benefit payments must be made to the landlord if a tenant builds up rent arrears of 8 weeks is an established part of the benefit scheme and is linked to housing law, under which the establishment of at least 8 weeks' worth of rent arrears is a ground for eviction. We intend to maintain this requirement for the standard local housing allowance pathfinder areas, together with other safeguards to protect landlords and vulnerable tenants.

We have made no assessment of the practical impact of the 8 week limit on possession cases.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on how the rapid re-claim facility for housing benefit will operate; and what targets have been set for the time taken to process these claims. [80256]

Malcolm Wicks: We introduced Rapid Reclaim for Housing Benefit recipients on 28 October 2002.

Rapid Reclaim removes barriers to taking and declaring work by reducing Housing Benefit recipients' concerns about the delays in reclaiming benefit if a job does not last. People of working age can re-claim Housing Benefit within 12 weeks of the end of their last claim, using a shortened, simplified claim form which includes a declaration that their circumstances are the same as when they previously claimed. Providing there have been no significant changes in circumstances, the local authority can process the claim based only on that declaration.

No clearance time targets have been set for Rapid Reclaim cases over and above the targets and performance indicators that already exist. However, the nature of Rapid Reclaim means that claims will be processed much more quickly than new Housing Benefit claims and that customers will therefore receive their benefit sooner.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions by what means information will be made publicly available about *(a)* the size and boundaries of localities determined by the Rent Service to calculate the standard local housing allowance in the housing benefit reform pilot areas and *(b)* what the average rent is by size of dwelling in those localities. [80251]

Malcolm Wicks: Under the new scheme, pathfinder authorities will be required to make information about the localities and the standard allowances publicly available. Details of the boundaries of localities and the standard allowances for different property sizes will therefore be accessible to both tenants and landlords

The details of the scheme will be set out in regulations and we will be consulting on these in due course.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many persons have been found to have been claiming benefits pending an asylum application in the UK and Eire at the same time in each of the last three years; [78502]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent of fraud perpetrated by those claiming benefits in Eire and the UK simultaneously whilst pursuing an asylum application. [78503]

Malcolm Wicks: Our strategy for tackling fraud focuses on prevention by tightening the gateway to benefits, making stringent checks to verify a person's identity and details of their claim at the outset.

People from abroad who wish to claim benefits must first provide sufficient evidence of their identity and circumstances for a National Insurance number (NINO) to be allocated.

This process involves a rigorous face to face interview, scrutiny of supporting documentation, and corroborative checks made on the information provided prior to the allocation of a NINO. The process applies to all foreign nationals requiring a NINO. If during the allocation process suspicions are raised as to the legitimacy of an individual's right to be in the country, the case is referred to the Department's National Identity Fraud Unit for further action.

Upon arrival in this country asylum seekers are initially supported by the Home Office National Asylum Support Service. Contact with this Department for the allocation of a NINO will therefore not normally take place until a decision has been made by the Home Office on the person's application for asylum. Once this has taken place (or if the person has been in the country for more than 6 months and is still awaiting a decision), an application for a NINO can be made.

There are arrangements in place between this Department and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs in the Republic of Ireland which allow fraud investigators to compare information held by both departments relating to individuals suspected of committing fraud.

Job Advertisements

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many posts were advertised in the press in each year from June 1999; and what percentage of them were advertised in the Scottish press. [76851]

Mr. McCartney *[holding reply 24 October 2002]:* The information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Goodwin and I *v.* UK

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 24 July, concerning the case of Goodwin and I *v.* UK, *Official Report*, col 1308W, if he will list the several Departments which have incurred costs in this case. [75743]

Mr. McCartney: This litigation raised policy implications for most Government Departments, however those Departments most closely involved are the Foreign Office, Lord Chancellor's Department, Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Heath.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when he will reply to the letters dated 28 August and 20 September from the hon. Member for Buckingham. [76017]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I replied to the hon. Member on 22 October.

Child Support

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many current CSA assessments would be altered by implementation of the proposed changes in procedures. [78729]

Malcolm Wicks: It is expected that the majority of assessments made by the Child Support Agency will alter when the new scheme is introduced for existing cases. This is expected to be about a year after the new scheme is commenced for new cases.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average payment made in child support maintenance by the non-resident parent under the CSA system for *(a)* one child, *(b)* two children and *(c)* three or more children, based on the most recent five per cent. scan of the Child Support Computer System. [79360]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding reply 4 November 2002]:* The information is in the table.

Average maintenance payment, £ per week

Number of qualifying children		
1	2	3
27.43	35.30	36.24

Notes:
1. Figures are taken from a 5 per cent sample of "live and assessed" cases of the May 2002 quarterly scan of the Child Support Computer System and so are subject to sampling variation.
2. Figures are based only on payments to parents with care made via the CSA collection service. Data is not held on those payments made directly by the non-resident parent to the parent with care.
3. Averages are based on cases with Full Maintenance Assessments only.
4. Payments made to reduce outstanding arrears are included in the calculation.
5. The averages exclude cases assessed at zero maintenance payable; these represent nearly half of all cases with a Full Maintenance Assessment.
6. The figures in the table represent average amounts paid by each non-resident parent for a single case.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average child support maintenance assessment is for *(a)* all, *(b)* employed and *(c)* unemployed non-resident parents for (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more qualifying children. [79364]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The information is given in the table.

Average maintenance assessment, £ per week

Employment status of non-resident parent	*Number of qualifying children*		
	1	2	3
All	19.05	25.38	23.45
Employed	33.96	43.08	44.86
Unemployed	2.27	2.89	1.92

Notes:
1. The averages take account of cases assessed at zero maintenance payable.
2. Figures are taken from a 5 per cent sample of all "live and assessed" cases of the May 2002 quarterly scan of the Child Support Computer System and so are subject to sampling variation.
3. Figures are for Full Maintenance Assessments only.
4. Employment status of the non-resident parent is based on the information held on the Child Support Computer System.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make a statement on the timetable for the introduction of the proposed changes in the CSA; and what assessment he has made of the impact upon the parent with responsibility of its proposed changes. [77308]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding reply 28 October 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the letter sent to right hon. and hon. Members on 19 September 2002 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, a copy of which was placed in the Library.

The White Paper "A new contract for welfare: children's rights and parents' responsibilities", (CM4349) published in July 1999, gives our most recent estimates.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, (1) if he will update his estimates of gainers and losers from his proposed reforms to child support; [74842]

(2) what estimates he has made of the change in average maintenance assessment under the new Child Support Scheme for a non resident parent supporting *(a)* one qualifying child, *(b)* two qualifying children and *(c)* three or more qualifying children. [76109]

Malcolm Wicks: The White Paper "A new contract for welfare: children's rights and parents' responsibilities", (CM 4349) published in July 1999, gives our most recent estimates.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of non-resident parents who will see (i) an increase and (ii) a decrease in their child support maintenance assessment under the new scheme, based on the *(A)* five per cent. scan of the Child Support Computer System that was conducted in August 2000 and *(B)* the most recent five per cent. scan of the system; [79363]

(2) if he will estimate the average child support maintenance assessment under the new scheme for *(a)* all, *(b)* employed and *(c)* unemployed non-resident parents for (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more qualifying children, based on the most recent scan of the Child Support Computer System; [79365]

(3) if he will estimate the average *(a)* weekly amount and *(b)* percentage change in child support maintenance assessment under the new scheme for (i) all, (ii) employed and (iii) unemployed non resident parents for (1) one, (2) two and (3) three or more qualifying children, based on the most recent five per cent. scan of the Child Support Computer System. [79368]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 November 2002]*: I refer my hon. friend to the letter sent to right hon. and hon. Members on 19 September 2002 by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

The White Paper "A new contract for welfare: children's rights and parents' responsibilities", (CM 4349) published in July 1999, gives our most recent estimates.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been paid in compensation for Child Support Agency maladministration in each of the last five years; and how many cases have been involved. [79361]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter to Mr. Steven Webb from Doug Smith, dated 7 November 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent parliamentary questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You ask how much has been paid in compensation for Child Support Agency maladministration in each of the last five years; and how many cases have been involved.

The amounts that have been paid by the Agency's Special Payments Team in respect of consolatory and financial redress and the number of cases involved are as follows:

	Number of Cases	*Total amount Paid (£)*
1997–1998	1,389	786,590
1998–1999	8,195	3,683,277
1999–2000	7,705	2,529,695
2000–2001	9,821	2,736,479
2001–2002	12,007	2,518,487

I hope you find this useful.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 649W, on child maintenance, what proportion of parents with care on income support and income-based jobseekers' allowance received maintenance for their children in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* at the most recent date for which figures are available. [79924]

Malcolm Wicks: Based on data for February for both years, in 1997, 36 per cent. of the total of 255,000 parents with care, on income support or income-based job seeker's allowance and with full maintenance assessments were receiving maintenance. For 2002, that proportion was 31 per cent., but of a caseload that had increased by over 50 per cent., to some 392,000 such parents with care.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints and queries have been dealt with by the Child Support Agency in each of the last five years; how many absent parents were no longer contactable in each of these years; how many maintenance accounts held by the agency were in arrears in each of these years *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Durham; and what the outstanding amounts were (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in Durham. [80233]

Malcolm Wicks: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible with the information requested and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what income sources his Department includes when measuring progress towards the Government's target on increasing the balance of spending on pensioners' incomes that comes from the private sector, as outlined on page 103 of the 1998 Green Paper on pensions Command Paper 4179; and what the figures were for each of these income sources in each year since 1998. [78331]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 41W, and on 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 420W–22W.

Harrow Benefits Agency

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints have been received about late payment of benefits by the Harrow Benefits Agency in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [77228]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Over the last 12 months, a total of 1,051 complaints have been received at the Harrow Social Security Office regarding late payment of benefits.

The last 12 months have seen substantial change in what was Harrow Benefits Agency and a period of industrial action which has had some impact on performance. The Harrow Social Security Office now forms part of the Jobcentre Plus District for Brent, Harrow and Hillingdon. The District has already begun an improvement programme including re-training for

staff in some areas of their work. This is already showing improved results in customer service and performance, with a corresponding reduction in the number of complaints received. There were 153 complaints about late payments of benefit in October 2001. By October 2002 there were only 13 complaints.

Disability Benefits

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many disabled benefit recipients have failed his Department's tests in each of the last five years for which records are available; and how many have had those benefits restored on appeal for each of the different tests for which disabled people are required to undergo. [76089]

Maria Eagle: Two medical assessments are used to determine incapacity for work for benefit purposes: the Own Occupation Test, which is applied during the first 28 weeks of incapacity, and the Personal Capability Assessment. Attendance Allowance (AA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) are self-assessment benefits and as such there is no requirement for a medical assessment. However, Decision Makers may request further evidence which can include a report from an examining medical practitioner.

The available information is in the tables.

Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) claims disallowed following application of the Personal Capability Assessment or the Own Occupation Test

	Incapacity Benefit		*Severe Disablement Allowance*	
Year	*Personal Capability Assessment*[1]	*Own Occupation Test*	*Personal Capability Assessment*[1]	*Own Occupation Test*
1 March 1997 to 28 February 1998	173,400	2,700	1,500	—
1 March 1998 to 28 February 1999	116,300[2]	4,700	1,000[2]	—
1 March 1999 to 29 February 2000	127,600	4,500	900	*100
1 March 2000 to 28 February 2001	96,900	5,600	700	—
1 March 2001 to 28 February 2002	103,900	5,100	1,100	—

Notes:
[1] The Personal Capability Assessment replaced the All Work Test in April 2000.
[2] Figures are for 3 quarters only. Due to a change in the recording system reliable figures for the personal capability assessment are not available for the quarter ending 30 November 1998.
[3] National Insurance Credits Only cases are included in these figures.
[4] Numbers marked "*" are based on a very few sample cases and are therefore subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used as a guide to the current situation only.
[5] "—" denotes nil or negligible.
Source:
Figures are based on 5 per cent samples of the Incapacity Benefit computer system and exclude a small number of clerically held cases.

Appeals against disallowance of IB following a Personal Capability Assessment found in favour of the appellant

Period	*Found in favour*
1 July 2000–31 December 2000	6,660
1 January 2001–31 December 2001	12,800
1 January 2002–30 September 2002	11,570

Appeals against disallowance of other benefits following a Personal Capability Assessment found in favour of the appellant

Period	*Found in favour*
01 July 2000–31 December 2000	165
01 January 2001–31 December 2001	315
01 January 2002–30 September 2002	260

Notes:
1. Includes cases where people are in receipt of SDA or Income Support with the Disability Premium.
2. Information on appeals following the Own Occupation Test is not collected separately.
3. All figures are subject to change as more up to date data become available.
4. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
5. Figures for 2002 are provisional.
6. Reliable data are not available prior to 1 July 2000.
Source:
100 per cent download of the Generic Appeals Processing System.

Jobcentre PWS Interviews

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many *(a)* income support, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* invalid care allowance, *(d)* bereavement benefit and *(e)* severe disablement allowance claimants have had (i) a new claim refused as a result of work focused interview non-attendance and (ii) benefit reduced as a result of failure to attend a repeat work-focused interview, under The Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001; [79371]

(2) what percentage of *(a)* income support, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* invalid care allowance, *(d)* bereavement benefit and *(e)* severe disablement (i) new claimants in Jobcentre Plus areas have had a claim refused as a result of work focused interview non-attendance and (ii) existing caseload claimants in Jobcentre Plus areas have had their benefit reduced as a result of failure to attend a repeat-work focused interview, under The Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001. [79372]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

NIRS2 Recalculation

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the average *(a)* underpayment and *(b)* overpayment for (i) retirement pension, (ii) widow's

benefit, (iii) bereavement benefit, (iv) incapacity benefit and (v) jobseeker's allowance is as a result of incorrect NIRS2 calculations; [79370]

(2) how many *(a)* retirement pension, *(b)* widow's benefit, *(c)* bereavement benefit, *(d)* incapacity benefit and *(e)* jobseeker's allowance cases are waiting for a review triggered by a NIRS2 calculation; [79366]

(3) how much has been paid in arrears of *(a)* retirement pension, *(b)* widow's benefit, *(c)* bereavement benefit, *(d)* incapacity benefit and *(e)* jobseeker's allowance; and to how many pensioners, as a result of incorrect NIRS2 calculations; [79367]

(4) how much has been paid in overpayment of *(a)* retirement pension, *(b)* widow's benefit, *(c)* bereavement benefit, *(d)* incapacity benefit and *(e)* jobseeker's allowance and to how many claimants, as a result of incorrect NIRS2 calculations; [79368]

(5) how much has been underpaid in *(a)* retirement pension, *(b)* widow's benefit, *(c)* bereavement benefit, *(d)* incapacity benefit and *(e)* jobseeker's allowance and to how many claimants as a result of incorrect NIRS2 calculations; [79369]

(6) how many cases are waiting for a review triggered by a NIRS2 calculation. [79357]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Up to 30 November 2001, the information requested is as follows:

Benefit or pension	*Total amount underpaid*	*Number underpaid*	*Average amount underpaid*	*Total amount overpaid*	*Number overpaid*	*Average amount overpaid*
Retirement pension	£64,171,357	190,791	£336	£2,895,937	11,629	£249
Widow's benefit/bereavement benefit	£29,420,184	17,496	£1,681	£316,123	722	£438
Incapacity benefit	£3,339,274	9,984	£334	£746,525	793	£941
Jobseekers allowance	£906,473	2,524	£359	£180,251	475	£379

Underpayments have been rectified. There should be no cases awaiting a review as a direct result of a NIRS2 recalculation.

Unemployment and Sickness Benefit (Wales)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are claiming *(a)* unemployment related and *(b)* sickness-related benefits in each local authority in Wales. [80240]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the tables.

Numbers of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in Wales by local authority at September 2002

Local authority	*Numbers*
Blaenau Gwent	1,740
Bridgend	1,730
Caerphilly	2,785
Cardiff	5,752
Carmarthenshire	2,485
Ceredigion	858
Conwy	1,454
Denbighshire	1,141
Flintshire	1,725
Anglesey, Isle of	1,554
Gwynedd	2,088
Merthyr Tydfil	1,139
Monmouthshire	837
Neath Port Talbot	2,280
Newport	2,714
Pembrokeshire	2,119
Powys	1,293
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	3,390
Swansea	3,979
The Vale of Glamorgan	1,906
Torfaen	1,385
Wrexham	1,702
Wales	46,056

Notes:

The figures include those receiving either contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or income-based JSA or both and those receiving National Insurance credits only.

Source:

Jobcentre Plus Computer Systems, 100 per cent. count of all unemployed people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.

Numbers of working age people claiming sickness-related benefits in Wales by local authority at May 2002

Local authority	*Numbers*
Blaenau Gwent	8,100
Bridgend	11,600
Caerphilly	17,200
Cardiff	18,700
Carmarthenshire	13,700
Ceredigion	4,400
Conwy	6,800
Denbighshire	5,800
Flintshire	7,300
Anglesey, Isle of	4,400
Gwynedd	5,900
Merthyr Tydfil	7,700
Monmouthshire	3,600
Neath Port Talbot	14,200
Newport	9,300
Pembrokeshire	7,200
Powys	6,400
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	24,700
Swansea	17,900
The Vale of Glamorgan	6,100
Torfaen	8,300
Wrexham	8,200
Wales	217,600

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. "Sickness-related" benefits are defined for the purposes of this table as Incapacity Benefit (IB), Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support with disability premium and National Insurance credits only (1B).

Source:

DWP Client Group Analysis, 5 per cent. statistical samples relating to May 2002.

Incapacity Benefit

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, in what circumstances incapacity benefit is means tested; and whether the incapacity benefit is reduced if a man aged 61 has an occupational pension. [76924]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Incapacity Benefit exists to provide a measure of earnings replacement for people of working age who are incapable of work. Where a person is duplicating this provision the law provides for this to be taken into account.

If a person claiming Incapacity Benefit receives an occupational pension, personal pension or payments through a permanent health insurance scheme of £85 a week or more, their Incapacity Benefit is reduced by half the amount which exceeds £85. Only people making new claims from 6 April 2001 are affected by the new rules.

Occupational Deafness

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when he will publish the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council report on occupational deafness. [79764]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council expects to publish its report on occupational deafness shortly.

Focus Group Research

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what use he and his Department have made of focus group research since June 2001; if he will identify for each research project the topics covered, the person or organisation carrying out the research, and the total cost; and if he will publish the research on his Department's website. [74986]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is available in the table.

Focus Group Research since 1 June 2001

Project Title	*Topics covered*	*Organisation undertaking the research*	*Total Cost*	*Research published on Department's website?*
Employment Service	Implementation Training and guidance	BMRB and Insite	£19,830	No
Review of the Job Entry Target	The Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target—focus groups with staff	Policy Research Institute	£24,105	No
Good Practice in Work Preparation	Purpose and function of Work preparation:	Social Policy Research Unit	£72,288	Yes
Evaluation of the permitted work rules for Incapacity Benefit claimants	The use of the new arrangements by staff who apply them or refer to them in their work.	Institute for Employment Studies	£199,000	Research commissioned in Summer 2002, findings to be published in 2004
Incapacity Benefits & Work Incentives	Client experiences of a series of work incentive measures.	Social Policy Research Unit	£47,025	Yes
The Role of GPs in Sickness Certification	The knowledge, attitudes and experiences of GPs acting as certifying medical practitioners.	National Centre for Social Research	£73,333	Yes
Diversity in Disability	To provide a greater understanding of the life experiences of disabled men and women from different minority ethnic groups.	National Centre for Social Research	£136,798	Research to be published early 2003.
Social Fund use amongst older people in Britain	To provide an understanding of the reasons for take-up and non-take-up among eligible older people.	Personal Finance Research Centre (PFRC), University of Bristol	£55,230	Yes
Attitudes to Electronic Service Delivery	Use of the internet and computers	Andrew Irving Associates	£46,000	The project is ongoing and will be published on the website when complete
Investigating Low Labour Market Participation among Lone Parents in London.	Six workshops conducted with lone parent "experts" such as NDLP advisers in London, Merseyside and Strathclyde.	The National Centre for Social Research.	£22,938	Forthcoming research to be published 2002–2003.
Partners of non JSA benefit recipients	Attitudes and barriers to work	ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd.	£52,385	Yes
Reforming Services for Pensioners: Perceptions of The Pension Service Proposed Business Model for 2006 Among Today's Pensioners	Customers' views of what they would like to see from The Pension Service in the future.	Forum Qualitative	£34,400	No, customer testing for internal use.

Focus Group Research since 1 June 2001

Project Title	*Topics covered*	*Organisation undertaking the research*	*Total Cost*	*Research published on Department's website?*
Evaluation of NDLP Innovation Fund	Client perceptions project delivery.	York Consulting	£80,051	Research will be published in early 2003 and will be available on department website in due course
Child Support Reforms	Testing of leaflets and letters.	Andrew Irvine Associates	£80,403	No

Pay Offer Pack

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the cost was of the Pay 2002 information pack circulation; and if he will make a statement in respect of targeting information to recipients [78337]

Mr. McCartney: The cost for design, print and distribution of the Department 2002 Pay Offer information pack was £1.34 per pack. Around 146,500 copies were issued to staff.

Distribution of the package was based on payroll information for staff from the former Department for Social Security, and the most recent "census" information for staff from the former Employment Service.

This year's pay offer to staff was particularly significant because it was the first since the Department was formed in 2001, where staff were brought together from the former DSS, Employment Services and Department for Education and Employment. For the past year different terms and conditions have applied within the Department.

The offer package provided staff with comprehensive details on a raft of harmonised changes to their terms and conditions, pay structure and conditions of employment for staff in the Department for Work and Pensions. The proposed changes to terms and conditions contained in the 2002 pay offer were complex and contractual. It was therefore, essential that all staff had the opportunity to read, understand and ask questions about the changes. The only way to ensure that this was achieved was to distribute personal copies of the information package to all staff in the Department.

Jobcentres (Wiltshire)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many employees there are broken down by function at *(a)* Avon House Jobcentre, Salisbury, *(b)* Amesbury Jobcentre and *(c)* Summerlock House, Salisbury; and what plans he has to change the number of jobs, broken down by function, at each location. [80301]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of staff and the functions they perform in the two jobcentres are as follows:

	Salisbury Jobcentre	*Amesbury Jobcentre*
Employer Services	1	1
Personal Advisers	7	1
Customer Services	9	2
Jobseeker's Allowance claims processing	6	0
Programme Centre	2	0
Management and Office services	1	1
Total	26	5

In the Summerlock House Social Security Office the staff deployment is as follows:

Customer Services	7
Income Support claims processing	8
Incapacity Benefit claims processing	10
Home visiting	2
Management and Office services	5
Counter Fraud Investigation Service	4
Minimum Income Guarantee claims processing	2
Retirement Pension claims processing	19
Total	57

There are no plans to make significant changes to job functions in the short term. In the longer term the migration of existing Jobcentres and Social Security Offices into fully integrated Jobcentre Plus offices and the development of The Pensions Service may lead to changes in job functions in order to deliver improved services to customers.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of his staff at *(a)* Avon House Jobcentre, Salisbury, *(b)* Amesbury Jobcentre and *(c)* Summerlock House, Salisbury were *(i)* threatened, *(ii)* verbally abused and *(iii)* physically assaulted in 2001; on how many occasions the police were called; and how many prosecutions followed. [80300]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of incidents recorded during 2001 was as follows:

Office Name	*Verbally Abused*	*Threatened*	*Actual Physical Assaults*	*Number of times the Police were asked to attend*	*Number of prosecutions*
Avon House Salisbury	11	7	3	3	0
Amesbury Jobcentre	0	1	0	0	0
Summerlock House Salisbury	3	1	1	0	0

Whilst clearly unacceptable, the physical assaults that occurred were minor incidents in which no member of staff sustained serious injuries.

Winter Fuel Payments

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the cost would be of extending winter fuel payments to those families who receive disability living allowance. [78645]

Maria Eagle: We estimate that the cost of extending Winter Fuel Payments to people under 60 who are receiving any rate of Disability Living Allowance would be around £270 million a year.

Notes:

Based on the 2000–2001 Family Resources Survey and data taken from DWP administrative records for November 2001 and May 2002.

Assumes that the payment is made to claimants in receipt of any rate of DLA who are aged under 60.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if the departmental computer error affecting the entitlement to the winter fuel payment of residents in separate tenement flats at the same street number has been rectified. [80083]

Mr. McCartney: It is not a question of a computer error but one of how we determine the number of eligible occupants of tenement flats in Scotland. This year, to ensure that the correct Winter Fuel Payments are made to people living in tenements in Scotland, staff have clerically intervened in the process.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when he expects pensioners to receive the winter fuel allowance this winter. [80089]

Mr. McCartney: The first payments were issued on 4 November, and payments will continue to be sent out over the next few weeks. The vast majority of eligible people, including those who receive payments automatically, will receive their payment before Christmas.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much money has been paid as winter fuel allowance to UK citizens living abroad since the allowance was introduced. [79156]

Mr. McCartney: To date, we have paid Winter Fuel Payments totalling £154,200 to 2,040 eligible people who are now living in an European Economic Area country other than the UK.

Pensions (Employer Contributions)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many employees with personal pension plans receive an employer contribution into their pension of *(a)* 0 *(b)* less than 3 per cent. *(c)* 3 to 3.9 per cent., *(d)* 4 to 4.9 per cent., *(e)* 5 to 5.9 per cent., *(f)* 6 to 6.9 per cent., *(g)* 7 to 9.9 per cent. and *(h)* 10 per cent. or higher (i) in total and (ii) broken down by *(A)* industry group *(B)* whether in the public or private sector and *(C)* employer size. [79959]

Mr. McCartney: The data are not available in the form requested. However, the Employers Pension Provision Survey 2000, the fourth in a series commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions, examined different types of pension arrangements in the private sector. The survey includes information on the proportion of employers who contribute to employees' personal pensions, who provide access to group personal pensions and the contribution rates that such employers make.

A copy of the report, entitled "Employers Pension Provision Survey 2000" by Alison Smith and Stephen McKay, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No. 163 is available in the Library.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many employees in defined benefit occupational pension schemes receive an employer contribution into their pension of *(a)* 0, *(b)* less than 3 per cent., *(c)* 3 to 3.9 per cent., *(d)* 4 to 4.9 per cent., *(e)* 5 to 5.9 per cent., *(f)* 6 to 6.9 per cent., *(g)* 7 to 9.9 per cent., and *(h)* 10 per cent. or higher (i) in total and (ii) broken down by *(A)* industry group, *(B)* whether in the public or private sector and *(C)* employer size; [79957]

(2) how many employees in defined contribution occupational pension schemes receive an employer contribution into their pension of *(a)* 0, *(b)* less than 3 per cent., *(c)* 3 to 3.9 per cent., *(d)* 4 to 4.9 per cent., *(e)* 5 to 5.9 per cent., *(f)* 6 to 6.9 per cent. *(g)* 7 to 9.9 per cent. and *(h)* 10 per cent. or higher (i) in total and (ii) broken down by *(A)* industry group *(B)* whether in the public or private sector and *(C)* employer size. [79958]

Mr. McCartney: Information on contributions to defined contribution occupational pension schemes and deferred benefit occupational pension scheme was collected as part of the Government Actuary Department's Occupational Pension Scheme Survey 2000, preliminary results from which were published recently.

A full breakdown of results in the form requested not available at this time. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with a full breakdown of the results and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Recruitment (Over-50s)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what percentage of new recruits to his Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79300]

Mr. McCartney: The complete information requested is not readily available. Such information as is available is in the table.

Percentage of new recruits aged 50 or over

Period	*Total new entrants*	*New entrants over 50*	*Percentage*	
01–04–00—30–09–00	5496	422	7.7	Ex ES
01–10–00—31–03–01	2857	404	14.1	Ex DSS
	5223	469	8.8	Ex ES
Total for Period	8080	873	10.8	

Percentage of new recruits aged 50 or over

Period	Total new entrants	New entrants over 50	Percentage	
01-04-01—31-03-02	13124	1594	12.1	Ex DSS
	8758	732	8.4	Ex ES
Total for period	21882	2326	10.6	
01-04-02—31-10-02	8439	1037	12.3	Ex DSS
	2691	214	8	Ex ES
Total for Period	11130	1251	11.2	

Telephone Helplines

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will list the telephone helplines run by his Department and its agencies including *(a)* the relevant telephone numbers and *(b)* how many calls each helpline has received in each of the last 12 months. [74729]

Mr. McCartney: The following tables list: the numbers of calls received for each of the last 12 months by each helpline run by the Department for Work and Pensions for which figures are collected centrally; and the published telephone numbers for each of these centres.

Helpline	DWP Public enquiry Office	BA & ES Chief Executive Helpline[1]	Chief Executive's helpline Jobcentre Plus[2]	Chief Executive's Helpline The Pension Service[2]	Employer Direct[3]	Jobseeker Direct	National Benefit Fraud Hotline
Telephone Number(s)	020 7712 2171	Discontinued	020 7273 6060	0113 232 4143	0845 601 2001	0845 6060 234	0800 854 440
Sep-01	7,402					334,405	20,644
Oct-01	10,044	395				351,863	18,852
Nov-01	7,658	407				417,758	15,771
Dec-01	5,162	342				178,736	8,299
Jan-02	8,776	400			193,854	617,598	16,147
Feb-02	8,582	354			159,230	505,711	12,809
Mar-02	9,381	294			140,285	429,282	15,013
Apr-02	15,649		250	194	163,170	475,210	14,139
May-02	13,185		230	112	172,674	507,160	15,747
Jun-02	13,099		297	120	151,079	500,873	11,390
Jul-02	20,939		245	131	144,405	508,151	14,569
Aug-02	23,868		245	119	188,132	578,813	10,735
Total	143,745	2,192	1,267	676	1,312,829	5,405,560	174,115

Helpline	Child Benefit Enquiry Line[4]	CSA National enquiry Line	CSA Midlands Customer Help Line	CSA South Eastern CHL	CSA Eastern CHL	CSA South Western CHL	CSA Wales North West CHL	CSA Scotland and North East CHL
Telephone Number(s)	08701 555540/ 08701 555501	0845 713 3133	08457 131 000	08457 134 000	08457 132 000	08457 137 000	08457 138 000	08457 136 000
Sep-01	225,073	45,728	39,466	30,994	46,859	34,520	39,403	43,836
Oct-01	262,668	44,722	38,213	30,386	43,396	34,795	36,616	41,285
Nov-01	214,731	56,039	45,429	37,422	40,393	46,645	45,475	53,099
Dec-01	158,633	28,776	30,490	22,595	57,806	27,294	31,949	35,364
Jan-02	259,415	36,513	38,782	29,663	35,126	34,764	41,389	42,664
Feb-02	233,487	59,661	38,907	30,560	46,914	38,260	39,496	45,571
Mar-02	216,689	43,729	45,056	34,464	48,647	47,403	50,958	57,514
Apr-02	222,148	52,531	37,091	28,818	53,130	35,983	35,395	42,901
May-02	221,342	63,376	45,327	36,301	41,876	46,646	44,783	53,505
Jun-02	213,215	45,700	35,875	27,234	50,475	35,711	29,128	41,489
Jul-02	260,523	48,453	37,476	28,275	38,167	34,991	34,769	44,066
Aug-02	227,970	58,028	43760	35,677	47,949	41,230	41,389	53,911
Total		583,256	475,872	372,389	550,738	458,242	470,750	555,205

Helpline	International Pension Centre	Pension Direct	Retirement Pension Teleclaims	Retirement Pension Forecasting Team[5]	Minimum income Guarantee Claimline	Benefit Enquiry Line	DLA AA
Telephone Number(s)	0191 218 7777	0845 301 3011	0845 300 1084	0845 300 0168/ 0191 22 87585	0800 0281111	0800 882200	08457 123456
Sep-01	16,894	78,755	38648	27,323	7,387	96,150	358,946
Oct-01	14,061	88,502	42823	32,946	10,060	99,869	424,764
Nov-01	14,375	106,923	29077	29,366	16,606	123,403	406,454
Dec-01	11,632	73,849	28156	15,448	8,595	63,484	292,704
Jan-02	16,297	110,517	51271	39,686	15,702	137,473	413,295
Feb-02	14,738	118,186	42403	37,113	16,703	112,503	386,341
Mar-02	12,993	115,360	41986	37,887	17,110	113,234	340,135
Apr-02	13,240	107,855	43930	43,234	26,969	117,225	395,570
May-02	17,875	103,395	39991	40,838	22,494	136,573	428,375
Jun-02	13,886	76,998	33217	34,858	19,472	98,095	312,259

Helpline	International Pension Centre	Pension Direct	Retirement Pension Teleclaims	Retirement Pension Forecasting Team[5]	Minimum income Guarantee Claimline	Benefit Enquiry Line	DLA AA
Jul-02	16,550	97,403	38538	47,861	20,042	110,567	416,802
Aug-02	13,879	88,175	34325	39,506	15,515	129,478	347,579
Total	176,420	1,165,918	464,365	426,066	196,655	1,338,054	4,523,224

Notes:
[1] Closed in March upon the foundation of Jobcentre Plus and The Pension Service.
[2] Opened in April following the formation of Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service.
[3] Employer Direct—The 11 centres were established incrementally mainly during 2001. Meaningful national figures are only available from January 2002.
[4] The first of the two telephone numbers shown is in widest use.
[5] The first of the two telephone numbers shown was introduced recently but the second number is still used widely.

Supported Employment

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which disability-specific national programmes his Department is funding for supported employment; and what plans he has to fund a national supported employment programme for people with autism and Asperger Syndrome. [77282]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: WORKSTEP is a national supported employment programme for disabled people who have complex barriers to finding and keeping work. The programme is not specific to any one disability but instead is designed to help all disabled people meeting the criteria to work in a supportive environment and, where possible, to progress in mainstream employment.

In addition, Disability Employment Advisers based in Jobcentres work with local employers to place people into jobs, making use of other specialist programmes such as Access to Work where necessary. These arrangements have enabled people with many different disability-related barriers to work, including those with autism and Asperger syndrome, to move successfully into jobs.

Stakeholder Pensions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make a statement on the take up of stakeholder pensions. [78222]

Mr. McCartney: Figures from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) show that up to the end of June 2002 1,011,934 stakeholder pensions had been sold. A detailed breakdown of sales will not be available until next year. Sales of over a million in their first 15 months on the market represents a very encouraging start.

In addition the ABI figures show that 330,296 employers had designated a scheme for their workforce. This means more people have the chance to save for a decent income in retirement through the workplace.

The ABI said that stakeholder pensions have also had a wider beneficial effect on pension provision by helping to increase the size of the overall pensions market. Stakeholder pensions have driven down other personal pension charges, some employers have widened access to their occupational pension schemes and other employers have set up group personal pensions with an employer contribution.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [80359]

Mr. McCartney: None.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what public consultations have been commenced by his Department in each month since 10 June; and what the *(a)* start date *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80277]

Mr. McCartney: Since 10 June 2002 the Department for Work and Pensions has commenced one public consultation entitled the Social Security Advisory Committee Review.

(a) 16–10–02

(b) 08–01–03

(c) http://www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2002/index.htm

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 632W, on post offices, what alternative methods he is assessing to pay benefit recipients who cannot be paid directly into an account. [79925]

Malcolm Wicks: Work is currently underway to identify an alternative for those people who cannot be paid directly into an account. We will ensure that the method introduced will be secure, efficient and available from outlets including Post Offices.

Jobcentre Plus Staff (Assaults)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the latest quarterly figures are for incidents of violence against staff in Job Centre Plus offices. [79070]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding reply 4 November 2002]:* We estimate that during the period July to September 2002 over 10 million callers visited Jobcentre Plus offices. The number of recorded assaults (excluding incidents of verbal abuse) in Jobcentre Plus offices during this period are shown in the table. The figures show a decrease on the previous quarter's statistics.

	Actual Assaults	Attempted Assaults
April to June 2002	92	191
July to September 2002	86	154

These figures include all offices within the Jobcentre Plus network including Jobcentres, Social Security Offices and newly integrated Jobcentre Plus Offices.

Outset Ltd

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what process he went through to satisfy himself of the solvency and fitness for purpose of the company Outset Ltd before it was contracted to deliver services to disabled people in the Bedfordshire area under New Deal; whether he has investigated its liquidation; and whether he intends to compensate disabled people who may have suffered loss through its failure. [79256]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding reply 4 November 2002]:* In line with standard procurement processes, an assessment of the legal status and financial capacity of Outset Limited was made prior to the awarding of a contract. The information provided by Outset was assessed by a panel comprising a range of officials and external stakeholders, including professionally qualified procurement staff, qualified accountancy staff and representatives of disability organisations. The process was audited by independent consultants.

It is not within this Department's remit to investigate the company's liquidation, although Jobcentre Plus officials have been in discussion with the Official Receiver regarding its effect on the New Deal for Disabled People.

Those people registered for New Deal help with Outset have been offered alternative provision that fully replaces the support that they were formerly receiving. In addition, officials are also addressing, on an individual basis as they are raised, concerns of those who were receiving other forms of provision delivered by Outset.

Pensioner Poverty

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of projected pensioner poverty. [79766]

Mr. McCartney: We are committed to tackling poverty and social exclusion among older people. The Government are spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of policies introduced since 1997. This includes £2½ billion more on the poorest third of pensioners.

Our annual Opportunity for all reports monitor progress against a range of indicators of the many different aspects of poverty and social exclusion affecting older peoples' lives.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the cost would be of extending the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme to Families with disabled children. [78646]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

To qualify for a grant under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, now marketed as Warm Front Team, the householder or their spouse must be in receipt of a qualifying income or disability related benefit. Householders in Receipt of the Disability Living Allowance are currently entitled to assistance up to the value of £1500. There are currently over 241,000 recipients of Disability Living Allowance aged under 16. If Warm Front was extended to include this group, allowing for a 100 per cent. take up the extra cost to the scheme would be over £361 million.

Warm Front is aimed at householders on low income. We believe that receipt of benefit is the best mechanism with which to assess the ability of the householder or their spouse to be able to afford to keep their home warm at a reasonable cost. We realise that this is a difficult issue, whatever the cut-off point, there will always be those who just miss out, but we must take a decision in order to ensure the most effective possible use of the available resources.

Radiation Exposure

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Works and Pension, what the maximum permitted levels of radiation exposure are for *(a)* workers in the nuclear industry and *(b)* members of the public; and how many times these have been exceeded in each of the last 20 years. [77643]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999 (IRR99) set the limit on effective dose for radiation exposure of any employee of 18 years and above as 20 millisieverts (mSv) in any calendar year. The limit on effective dose for radiation exposure of any member of the public is 1 millisievert in any calendar year.

IRR99 came into force on 1 January 2000. The previous annual limits were set out in the Ionising Radiation Regulations 1985 (IRR85) that came into force on 1 January 1986, and were 50 millisieverts for employees and 5 millisieverts for members of the public.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) does not hold details in a readily accessible form of the number of cases where it has been notified that the statutory limits have been exceeded in respect of all nuclear workers. The following data have been drawn from the HSE's national database of occupational exposure to ionising radiation—the Central Index of Dose Information (CIDI).

Year	Number Of Cases Greater Than 50mSv Under IRR85
1986	1
1987	2
1988	1
1989	3
1990	1
1991	0
1992	0
1993	0
1994	0
1995	2
1996	1
1997	0

Year	Number Of Cases Greater Than 50mSv Under IRR85
1998	0
1999	0
	Number of cases greater than 20mSv under IRR99
2000	1
2001	0

The database started in 1986 and its main purpose is to provide a continuous record throughout the lifetime for employees who, at the same time in their working lives, have been designated by their employer(s) as "classified person" under IRR99 or IRR85.

Blind/Partially Sighted People

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what percentage of *(a)* blind and *(b)* partially sighted people in each of the nations of the UK are unemployed. [79763]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There is no central register of people who are clinically blind or partially sighted. However, some information on the number of people reporting a visual impairment is available from the Labour Force Survey. The available information is in the table.

People Of Working Age Who Report That They Have Difficulty In Seeing

	Percentage Not In Employment
England	62
Wales	66
Scotland	67
Northern Ireland	*
United Kingdom	63

Notes:
1. Percentages are calculated from the Spring 2002 Labour Force Survey.
2. The data do not include respondents whose eyesight problems are effectively compensated for by wearing glasses or contact lenses. However, the LFS may overstate the numbers because some of those who identify difficulty in seeing would not necessarily be diagnosed as blind or partially sighted.
3. The term "not in employment" includes people who are not actively seeking work as well as those who are covered by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of unemployment. The ILO unemployment rates for people with visual impairments are only available for England and the UK because of small sample sizes.

Payment Methods

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Harwich (Mr. Henderson) of 21 October 2004 *Official Report*, column 14, on the Universal Bank, what alternative arrangements he will put in place for those people who will not be able to use the PIN number associated with a Post Office card account. [78076]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 652W.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which benefits he intends to transfer from cash payments to direct bank transactions in April 2003; and of these *(a)* what proportion of recipients he expects will opt to continue receiving payments in cash and *(b)* what saving his Department will make in the cost of making payments. [79414]

Malcolm Wicks: From April 2003 the normal method of payment for benefits and pensions will be direct into bank and building society accounts (including the Post Office card account).

Customers will be able to access their cash at banks/ building societies and Post Office Branches.

Even where a customer is paid directly into an account, they can still collect their cash at post office branches, either through existing network banking arrangements between Post Office Ltd and several banks or, from 2003, through universal banking services at post offices.

On costs, I refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer I gave the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on Monday 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 806W.

Income Support

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether it is possible for somebody to become financially worse off as a consequence of moving from a position of receiving income support and housing benefit and council tax benefit to a position of receiving incapacity benefit with the right to put a claim in for housing benefit and council tax benefit. [77085]

Malcolm Wicks: Where a person is not in receipt of Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit is assessed by comparing a person's net income with an amount which is broadly similar to what they would receive on either Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. For each pound that their income exceeds that level, the amount of benefit payable is reduced by fixed tapers of 65 pence for Housing Benefit and 20 pence for Council Tax Benefit. As a consequence people will generally see an improvement in their overall financial position.

Anti-fraud Strategy

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff are employed by Jobcentre Plus on anti-fraud work; and how many people were employed in total on this work in the two predecessor departments. [74846]

Malcolm Wicks: The overall aim of the Department's anti-fraud strategy is to have a benefit system, which is secure from first claim to final payment. The implementation of this strategy means that an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of all staff in the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments.

When the Department for Work and Pensions was established, the Employment Service, which was an Agency of the former Department for Education and Employment, did not have any staff dealing specifically with benefit fraud.

The information currently available suggests that, over recent years, around 5,000 staff have been employed by the Department and its agencies in work to investigate suspicions of fraud. However, taking account of changes in data collection measures over time and the integration of investigators more fully with frontline staff, it is clear to me we need to improve the validity of and reliability of year on year comparisons, and I have asked the Department to undertake further work on this. I have concluded that it is not possible to make valid comparisons between figures year-on-year.

I have therefore asked the Department to undertake a review to improve the consistency of centrally collected information for the future.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the rate of staff turnover in each of the last three years in *(a)* benefit fraud inspection work and *(b)* his Department as a whole. [74847]

Malcolm Wicks: The overall aim of the Department's anti-fraud strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment. The implementation of this strategy means that an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of all staff in the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments.

The information currently available suggests that, throughout the period, around 5,000 staff have been employed by the Department and its agencies in work to investigate suspicions of fraud. However, on examination, it is clear that data on the number of staff is not consistent as data collection measures have changed over time and as the deployment of investigators has become more fully integrated with front line staff. I have concluded that it is not possible to make valid compariaons between the figures year-on year.

I have therefore asked the Department to undertake a review to improve the consistency of centrally collected information for the future.

The following table provides information available on the total numbers of permanent staff and numbers of leavers in the last three years, for the areas that now come under the Department for Work and Pensions.

Year (1 April to 31 March)	*Permanent Staff*	*Leavers*
1999–2000	118,926	Insufficient data held
2000–2001	126,942	9,642
2001–2002	134,247	5,692

Employers' Liability Insurance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of the number of companies conducting business without employers' liability insurance. [75850]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Social Fund

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will review the rules that require family members not on qualifying benefits to pay for funerals, rather than receiving help from the Social Fund; [79179]

(2) if he will increase the amount of grant available for funeral expenses in the funeral payment from the Social Fund; [79180]

(3) if he will review the operation of the rules that require the liability of family members not on a qualifying benefit to be considered when application for a funeral grant is made. [79211]

Malcolm Wicks: The Social Fund targets help on people with the lowest incomes who qualify for income-related benefits.

Social Fund funeral payments cover the cost of necessary charges including fees levied by burial authorities and crematoria. In addition, up to £600 is allowed for other funeral expenses. This gives the person arranging the funeral the freedom to select the items or services they consider appropriate.

We have no plans to change these arrangements, but we keep the level of support provided with funeral costs under review.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on his policy on the future availability of Social Fund loans and their extension to a wider group of people on low incomes, with particular reference to *(a)* providing support to families with children and *(b)* combating social exclusion; [68221]

(2) if he will ensure that the Social Fund continue to provide *(a)* loans and *(b)* an improved system of grants; [79206]

(3) if he will review the arrangements for access to Crisis Loans; [79208]

(4) if he will abolish the qualification period of 26 weeks for Budgeting Loans; [79213]

(5) if he will change the eligibility criteria to enable people whose sole income is contributory benefit such as incapacity benefit or contribution based jobseeker's allowance to apply for help from both the discretionary and the regulated Social Fund. [79215]

Malcolm Wicks: Our priority is to tackle poverty and combat social exclusion by helping those who are able into work and making work pay, and increasing support for the most vulnerable members of society: children, pensioners, and disabled people.

The Social Fund supports that strategy by giving help to millions of people on low incomes for a variety of intermittent expenses. Social Fund help is targeted on the neediest people in our society.

Access to a Crisis Loan is available to anyone in an emergency or as a consequence of a disaster where there is no other means of preventing serious damage or serious risk to their health or safety or that of their family. There is no requirement for a Crisis Loan

applicant to be receiving an income-related benefit, but any income or capital they have will be taken into account.

Over 1 million Budgeting Loans were provided to people last year. We believe it is right that there should be a waiting period before these loans become available and that six months is a reasonable period for people to rely on their own resources before turning to the state.

We keep all aspects of the Fund under review.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will change the eligibility criteria to allow people who qualify for the maximum child credit and working tax credit to apply for help from both the discretionary and the regulated Social Fund. [79178]

Malcolm Wicks: With the introduction of the New Tax Credits from April 2003, anyone who receives the Child Tax Credit at the maximum rate or any other rate greater than the family element, or the Working Tax Credit where a disabled worker is included in the assessment, will qualify for Sure Start Maternity Grants and Funeral Payments from the regulated Social Fund, provided that all of the other eligibility criteria are met.

Patsy Calton: To ask the the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will ensure that from April 2003, people who qualify for maximum child credit and/or who qualify for Working Tax Credit are eligible to apply for grants from the regulated Social Fund, with particular reference to *(a)* Sure Start Maternity Grants and *(b)* Funeral Grants. [79207]

Malcolm Wicks: From April 2003, Sure Start Maternity Grants and Funeral Payments will be payable to families receiving Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Tax Credit at the maximum rate or any other rate greater than the family element, or Working Tax Credit where a disabled worker is included in the assessment.

Crisis Loans

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will review the arrangements for the granting and collection of Crisis Loans, with particular reference to accessibility in rural areas. [79181]

Malcolm Wicks: We believe that the current arrangements are sufficiently flexible to support a good standard of delivery to customers, regardless of their location.

Budgeting Loans

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will ensure that regular statements are issued showing the outstanding balance on any budgeting loan; [79218]

(2) if he will amend the repayment formulae to allow the option of more modest repayment rates; [79219]

(3) if he will *(a)* increase the maximum possible budgeting loan and *(b)* review the treatment of outstanding loans. [79220]

Malcolm Wicks: We have improved the standard of information given to applicants to explain Budgeting Loan decisions. In addition to the standard letter of notification, we now provide a calculation sheet which sets out, in clear stages, how the final decision has been reached.

The scheme already provides for anyone who finds the repayments terms offered unacceptable to opt for a lower size of loan and lower repayments. In addition, anyone who has difficulty maintaining repayments can ask for the repayment period to be extended so that weekly repayments are reduced to a more manageable level.

The £1000 limit on total debt to the Social Fund has been set to ensure access to a reasonable and manageable level of credit which recognises the possible needs of people on Income Support and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. It means that debt owed to the Social Fund is kept to a manageable level. Keeping the limit at its present level means repayment deductions from benefit can be set at a reasonable level.

We continue to keep all elements of the Social Fund under review to see whether further improvements can be made to its operation and to ensure that the Fund supports our wider welfare reforms.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Organised Crime

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what the membership is of the Organised Crime Task Force in Northern Ireland. [79416]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF), which I chair, is a Government led multi-agency initiative to tackle organised crime. It is made up of the Northern Ireland Office, Police Service of Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Customs & Excise, National Criminal Intelligence Service, Home Office and the Inland Revenue. The Task Force is supported by a number of sub groups and expert groups comprising of other Government departments and agencies with a role to play in tackling organised crime including the Health and Safety Executive, Trading Standards Services and the Environment and Heritage Service

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what funds have been allocated specifically for tackling organised crime in Northern Ireland. [79417]

Jane Kennedy: It is for the law enforcement agencies to decide what resources should be allocated to tackling organised crime effectively in order to deliver their operational strategies.

The Organised Crime Task Force seeks to bring the Agencies together in a way that respects their independence and autonomy and allows them to share information and agree priorities. This enables the agencies to agree shared priorities at a senior level and to commit resources and assistance to each other.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what the terms and conditions are of the appointment of Professor Ronald Goldstock as an adviser to the Secretary of State on organised crime; and what his remuneration is. [79415]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State appointed Professor Goldstock, ex-director of the New York State Organised Crime Task Force, in March 2002 to act as an independent expert and to provide an international perspective on the problem of organised crime in Northern Ireland.

He has been asked to report to the Secretary of State, with recommendations for tackling the problem and, in particular, to formulate proposals for securing cross-community support for action, drawing on international experience.

His remuneration is 1,000US dollars per diem.

Academic Selection

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Pursuant to the answer of the Minister of State on 28 October, *Official Report*, column 513W, on the 11-plus, on what evidence he bases the Government's view on the ending of academic selection and the extent of opposition to this proposal. [79742]

Jane Kennedy: The responses to the consultation and the extent of support for and opposition to academic selection and the other proposals in the Burns Report are set out in a Report on the Consultation published on 8 October by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland. Copies of the Report are being placed in the Library.

No decisions have been taken on academic selection and my officials will be discussing the responses to consultation with our educational partners and representatives of parents over the coming weeks.

Parades Commission

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when he received the Quigley review of the operation of the Parades Commission; when he transmitted the report to the *(a)* Government of Ireland, *(b)* Northern Ireland political parties, *(c)* members of the Parades Commission, *(d)* Loyal Orders and other marching organisations and *(e)* principal residents' group; what the recommendations of the report are; and when he plans to put it into the public domain. [78985]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Sir George Quigley submitted his report on 27 September 2002. It has now been printed and copies have been placed in the Library. I have circulated the report today and intend to allow a period of consultation up to the end of January next year. I will be seeking a broad cross-section of opinion, including from those parties referred to by my hon. Friend.

Blind/Partially Sighted People

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland suffer from *(a)* serious sight loss and *(b)* blindness. [79424]

Desmond Browne: Information is not available in the form requested.

Information collected by the Department from Health and Social Services Trusts showed that, at the end of March 2002, there were around 2,200 people in Northern Ireland registered as visually impaired.

During the financial year 2001-2002, there were 2,604 blind and 3,283 partially sighted people recorded by Trusts as being in contact with Social Services personnel.

The numbers of registrations and the numbers of people in contact with Social Services are underestimates of the total number of people with a visual impairment, as not all such people are registered or in regular contact with Social Services.

General Practice

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what *(a)* area is covered by and *(b)* the greatest travelling time between doctor and patient is in each general practice out of hours co-operative in Northern Ireland. [79781]

Desmond Browne: The areas covered by each general practice out-of-hours co-operative in the four Health and Social Services Boards is shown in the table below. Also shown is the estimated greatest travelling time between patient and Co-operative.

Eastern Health and Social Services Board

Out-of-Hours Co-OP	*Areas covered*	*Estimated greatest travelling time*
Belfast Doctors on Call (BELDOC)	North and West Belfast	30 mins
South East Belfast Doctors on Call (SEBDOC)	South and East Belfast	20 mins
North Down and Ards Doctors on Call (NDADOC)	North Down and Ards Peninsula	1 hour
South Down Doctors on call (DOWNEDOC)	South Down	30 mins

Southern Health and Social Services Board

Association of Southern Area Doctors on Call (ASADOC) Moy Centre	Armagh and Dungannon	1 hour
ASADOC Moylinn Centre	Craigavon and Banbridge	1 hour
ASADOC Newry Centre	Newry and Mourne	1 hour

Northern Health and Social Services Board

Dalriada Doctors on Call(DALDOC) operates from 4 permanent out-of-hours centres in Ballymena, Coleraine, Moneymore and Newtownabbey and 2 part time in Antrim Hospital and Moyle Hospital	Coleraine, Moneymore, Ballymena, Antrim and Newtownabbey	40 mins

Western Health and Social Services Board

Foyle Doctors on Call (FOYLEDOC)	Londonderry and Eglington Limavady,	30 mins

Western Health and Social Services Board

ROEDOC	Dungiven, Feeny and Claudy	35mins
MOURNEDOC	Strabane, Donemana, Castlederg and Newtownstewart	30mins
WESTDOC	Fermanagh, Fintona, Dromore, Drumquin, Carrickmore, Gortin and Plumbridge	30mins

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* practices are involved in each of the general practice out of hours co-operatives in Northern Ireland. [79782]

Desmond Browne: The number of doctors and practices involved in general practice out-of-hours co-operatives in each of the four Health and Social Services Boards is shown in the table below.

Eastern Health and Social Services Board

Out-of-Hours Co-OP	*Number of GPs*	*Number of Practices*
Belfast Doctors on Call (BELDOC)	63	22
South East Belfast Doctors on Call (SEBDOC)	80	28
North Down and Ards Doctors on Call (NDADOC)	79	29
South Down Doctors on call (DOWNEDOC)	32	13

Southern Health and Social Services Board

Association of Southern Area Doctors on Call (ASADOC) Moy Centre	63	22
ASADOC Moylinn Centre	75	25
ASADOC Newry Centre	51	22

Northern Health and Social Services Board

Dalriada Doctors on Call(DALDOC) operates from 4 permanent out-of-hours centres in Ballymena, Coleraine, Moneymore and Newtownabbey and 2 part time in Antrim Hospital and Moyle Hospital	244	78

Western Health and Social Services Board

Foyle Doctors on Call (FOYLEDOC)	71	16
ROEDOC	20	7
MOURNEDOC	23	6
WESTDOC	55	25

Diabetes

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what action he is taking to increase screening for children and adults in cases where a family member has already been diagnosed as being diabetic. [80357]

Desmond Browne: No screening for diabetes in any children or adults takes place at present. The National Screening Committee, which is responsible for providing advice to Health Ministers on all aspects of screening policy, is presently developing proposals for research into the area of screening for type 2 diabetes among high-risk groups. The Committee has made a commitment to provide definitive advice on this topic to Health Department in 2005

European City of Culture

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what measures he proposes to advance the application of Belfast to be named European City of Culture. [78355]

Angela Smith: On 30 October 2002, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced the shortlist of six cities which were successful in being nominated as Centres of Culture and will now be under consideration for the final nomination of European Capital of Culture 2008 in Spring 2003.

I regret that Belfast was not among the six cities shortlisted by the independent judging panel and therefore Belfast is no longer in competition for designation as European Capital of Culture in 2008.

Personal Care

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Personal Care will be completed; when he expects to publish the report; and what public consultation he plans on its findings. [79439]

Desmond Browne: The Inter-Departmental Group's Report on Free Personal Care was forwarded to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on Thursday 8 August 2002. Following discussion at the Executive on 12 August, Ministers asked for further work to be undertaken. That work has not yet been completed. In any event, it is not possible at this stage to give any indication about the timing or subsequent handling of the report, since this is a matter which should be determined by the Executive.

Castlereagh Break-in

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many police officers have had to move home in response to the security threat arising from the break-in at Castlereagh Police Station; and what has been the cost to the taxpayer. [76152]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The PSNI has, to date, processed 92 SPED applications in relation to the break-in at Castlereagh. Information on cost for specific applications is not available. Under the SPED Scheme, a Chief Constable's certificate is sufficient for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to invoke the

scheme, without the need for further background as to the individual or the actual incident concerned. However I can confirm that the total number of SPED applications accepted since April this year is 169 and the cost to date is £17.7m.

Business Manifesto

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what assessment he has made of the Business Manifesto issued by the Confederation of British Industry for Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [77600]

Mr. Pearson: I welcome this Business Manifesto, which sets out how the CBI sees the important interaction between the public and private sectors to achieve a better economic future. The Manifesto addresses many of the issues which are of critical importance to the development of the Northern Ireland economy and which relate closely to the strategic priorities developed by the Economic Development Forum. I look forward, with my ministerial colleagues, to exploring the proposals contained in the Manifesto.

Law and Order Task Force

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what the terms of reference are of the Law and Order Task Force; what its membership is; how frequently and where it will meet; what resources have been made available to it over the next two years; what body will provide its secretariat and staff; and what decisions the Task Force has made. [74795]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The terms of reference for the Law and Order Action Group are

"to monitor the effectiveness and co-ordination of action to combat crime and reinforce law and order in Northern Ireland."

The Group will help support the independent operational agencies in their co-ordinated approach to tackling all aspects of crime. I chair the Group. The other members are Jane Kennedy, Des Browne, Lord Goldsmith, Rosie Winterton and their advisers. The Chief Constable and the Director of Public Prosecutions attended the first meeting on 24 September and will be invited to attend future meetings. The Group will meet on a regular basis, the location to be decided as appropriate for each meeting. No specific resources have been allocated to the Group. The Northern Ireland Office provides the Secretariat. The Group is taking a broad look at the crime spectrum; public order issues were discussed at the first meeting.

European Court Cases

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will place in the Library a copy of the paper delivered on 8 October to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in relation to the cases of Jordan, McKerr, Kelly and Others *v.* UK and Shanaghan *v.* UK; and it he will list the members of the group of officials established to consider the Government response to these cases. [78146]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Today, I have placed in the libraries of both Houses a copy of the package of measures sent to the Secretariat to the Council of Europe. On receipt of the judgements, an article 2 group was established to provide advice to Ministers on the judgements and the Government's response. The group consisted of Northern Ireland Office Officials and legal advisers, and representatives from FCO, MOD, Northern Ireland Court Service and the Attorney General's Office. Representatives of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions attended meetings to provide advice as to any practical implications that arose.

Police Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what the cost was of organising and publicising the PSNI New Directions conference; what monies were expended on external consultancies and promoters; how many persons attended, broken down by sex and perceived community background; and if he will place the major speeches and papers from the conference in the Library. [78795]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The costs of the PSNI's conference ("New Directions: a human rights and racial equality focus on policing with ethnic minority communities") have not yet been finalised but it is anticipated that the final costs will be approximately £60,000.

About 230 delegates attended the conference which took place on 21 and 22 October, including my hon. friend the Member and Northern Ireland Office colleague, the member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun. Community background information was not sought from delegates but a list of the organisations invited to attend is below. From the register of attendance, the gender breakdown was approximately 50:50.

Key speakers at the conference included: Hugh Orde, Chief Constable, PSNI; Lord Herman Ouseley, former Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality; Imran Khan, solicitor; Cressida Dick, Commander, Diversity Directorate in the Metropolitan police; Joe Stewart, head of human resources for the PSNI; Ravi Chand, President of the National Black Police Association; Maqsood Ahmed, Director of Diversity for the National Probation Service; Zelda Holtzman, Deputy Provincial Commissioner of the Western Cape, South Africa; and Sam Kinkaid, Assistant Chief Constable in the PSNI with responsibility for human rights issues.

Representatives from all district command units in the PSNI were invited to attend the conference as well as representatives of the following groups:

Al-Nisa Association of Northern Ireland
Amnesty International
An Garda Síochána
Belfast Islamic Centre
Belfast Travellers Education and Development Group
Belfast Travellers Support Group
British Irish Rights Watch
Chinese Community Association
Chinese Welfare Association
Committee on the Administration of Justice
Craigavon Vietnamese Club
Concept 11
Council of Europe
Director of Public Prosecutions

Equality Commission of Northern Ireland
Indian Community Centre
Mediation Northern Ireland
Mid-Ulster Group
Multi-cultural Resource Centre
National Black Police Association
Northern Ireland African Cultural Centre
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
Northern Ireland Council for Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Northern Ireland Filipino Association
Northern Ireland Gay Rights
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
Northern Ireland Office
Northern Ireland Pakistani Association
Northern Ireland Policing Board
Northern Ireland Victim Supp
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister—Racial Equality Unit
Office of the Oversight Commission
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
Traveller Movement of Northern Ireland
Wah-Hip Chinese Community Association
Women of the World

A conference report is being compiled which will contain any materials submitted by speakers and participants. This will be made available on the PSNI website in due course and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what consultancy fees *(a)* the Policing Board, *(b)* The RUC/PSNI and *(c)* the Northern Ireland Office have paid in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001 and to which companies; what the purpose was of the consultancy contracts; and what estimates he has made of consultancy fees for the next two financial years. [78145]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I will write to my hon. Friend. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Parliamentary Boundary Commission

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will announce the name of the newly appointed member of the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Boundary Commission. [80099]

Paul Murphy: I am pleased to announce that I have recently issued a Warrant of Appointment for the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Boundary Commission to Mr.Richard Mackenzie, CB. The appointment will run until 29 October 2006

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

East Timor

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the creation of a UN International Tribunal to bring to justice the major perpetrators of crimes against humanity during Indonesia's occupation of East Timor; and what discussions her Department has had with *(a)* the UN, *(b)* the USA and *(c)* the Government of East Timor concerning the establishment of such a Tribunal. [78719]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

In February 2000, the United Nations Security Council accepted Indonesia's pledge to conduct its own enquiry and prosecute those responsible for crimes committed in East Timor in 1999. This led to the establishment of an Ad Hoc Tribunal on 14 March 2002. As it is still considering several of the cases it would be premature to push for an alternative justice mechanism now. If we judge that it has not delivered justice we will certainly consider the case for an international tribunal with our EU partners and others in the international community. Officials in Washington and Dili have already discussed the idea of an international tribunal with US and UN officials and representatives of the East Timorese government.

The East Timorese government with the assistance of the UN Special Crimes Unit is also investigating serious human rights violations that have taken place during the last 25 years. The East Timor Commission for Truth and Reconciliation which was established on 7 February 2002 is dealing with less serious violations.

Malawi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the arrest and subsequent release of the leader of the opposition in Malawi; and what discussions she has had with the government of Malawi on the subject. [78679]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

The arrest on 20 October of Gwanda Chakuamba, President of the main opposition Malawi Congress Party, and three of his colleagues, followed the circulation of a letter purportedly detailing the ruling party's strategy on changing the Constitution to allow President Muluzi to run for a third term in office. Mr.Chakuamba was released by the court on bail the following day having been charged with libel, forgery and disseminating false information in connection with the letter.

The proposal for a third term has generated intense political debate in Malawi. We and other international partners have urged that there should be broad consultation on the issue and that it should be conducted in an atmosphere free from violence and intimidation.

Health and Education

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what proportion of the UK's overseas aid budget is allocated to a) basic health provision and b) education. [78073]

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what percentage of her Departments budget has been allocated to *(a)* basic healthcare and *(b)* primary education in each year since 1997. [76973]

Clare Short: Since 1997 my Department has committed over £870 million to support education and £1.5 billion to support health care in partner countries. This represents 13 per cent. and 24 per cent. respectively of bilateral commitments over the same period. Of this, over £700 million went to primary education and £1.3 billion to basic health care, representing 11 per cent. and 20 per cent. respectively of bilateral commitments.

These figures are based on the bilateral portfolio as a whole rather than annual allocations and could only be disaggregated at disproportionate cost. They do not include support for education and health provided through our multilateral contributions.

Rwanda/Uganda

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting between President Museveni and President Kagame in London last week. [76970]

Clare Short: President Museveni and President Kagame recommitted themselves and their Governments to the Understanding they signed last November in London on not interfering in each others' political and security affairs. They agreed to make more regular and effective use of the mechanisms that had been put in place to resolve differences and to avoid recourse to the use of the media. The UK agreed to continue to act as Third Party in this process.

Equally importantly Presidents Museveni and Kagame agreed to work together to achieve peace and stability in the region. They urged President Mbeki of South Africa, as Chairman of the African Union, to convene an urgent Regional Summit to call on all parties to fully implement the Pretoria and Luanda Peace Agreements.

Presidents Museveni and Kagame shared my deep concern at the situation in Burundi and agreed we should all work together, especially with the Governments of Tanzania and South Africa, to get a full cease fire and support the Transitional National Government under the Arusha Accords.

Water Supplies (Palestinian Territories)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment her Department has made of the water security situation in the Palestinian Territories; and if she will make a statement. [78203]

Clare Short: Water has long been a major problem for rural Palestinian communities. The severe economic and social decline caused by closures and curfews has compounded the problem. Many villages without water networks are facing shortages, as water tankers cannot access villages, or people can no longer afford the escalating price of tankered water. The situation has been exacerbated by the recent Israeli ban on drilling for water in the West Bank. Households cope by going into debt, seeking alternative water sources (that are often not clean), and cutting back on consumption. All of these responses pose threats to family well-being. In conjunction with other donors, we are working with the Palestinian Water Authority, and a number of rural communities, to help improve water security. We are also supporting a study by PWA of the western aquifer water source, to assess its sustainable yield.

Lira Refugee Camp

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on the overcrowding in the refugee camp in Lira, Uganda; what discussions her Department has had with non-governmental organisations working in the camp; what assessment her Department has made of the vulnerability of women as a result of the sleeping arrangements in the camp; how much aid her Department will give to Uganda in 2002–03; what plans her Department has to give aid to the refugee camp in Lira; and what assessment her Department has made of *(a)* starvation and *(b)* health levels of the refugees in the camp. [79541]

Clare Short: The circumstances faced by internally displaced people in Lira are of grave concern. We are monitoring the situation closely with international partners and the Government of Uganda, and are considering an appropriate response in the light of a detailed report recently issued from local NGOs.

The total DFID aid programme for Uganda for 2002–03 is scheduled to be £75 million. In response to the recent escalation in insecurity, DFID has committed £450,000 for humanitarian supplies for internally displaced persons in Northern Uganda.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what strategies her Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79296]

Clare Short: My Department's Equal Opportunities Policy Statement makes it clear that DFID does not permit discrimination on grounds of age in either its recruitment or any of its other personnel management processes.

The only age-related practice has been the operation of an age of retirement of 60—consistent with the normal retiring age specified in the Principal Civil Service Pensions Scheme and with the purposes of section 109(1)*(a)* (i) of the Employment Rights Act 1996. However, agreement has recently been reached that, with the exception of the Senior Civil Service, staff may, if they so wish, continue to serve until age 65, which will make that the normal retiring age for the purposes of the 1996 Act.

European Bank of Reconstruction and Development

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what financial support her Department has given to the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development in each of the last five years; and what support her Department will provide in the next three years. [79151]

Clare Short: As a shareholder (8.5 per cent.) in the EBRD, the UK Government makes payments towards its capital subscription in the Bank.

As part of the General Capital Increase, agreed in 1996, my Department has made cash payments and issued promissory notes as detailed below:

	Cash Element	*Promissory Notes*
1998	Euro 9,582,000	Euro 14,373,281
1999	Euro 9,582,000	Euro 14,373,281
2000	Euro 9,582,000	Euro 14,373,281
2001	Euro 9,582,000	Euro 14,373,281
2002	Euro 9,582,000	Euro 14,373,281

Over the next three years the following payments will be made:

	Cash Element	*Promissory Notes*
2003	Euro 9,582,000	Euro 14,373,281
2004	Euro 9,582,000	Euro 14,373,281
2005	Euro 9,582,000	Euro 14,373,281

My Department has also provided grant funding to support EBRD's technical cooperation work. The EBRD has received the following contributions from DFID over the last five years:

1998—£1,100,000
1999—£300,000
2000—£950,000
2001—£1,690,125
2002—£899,000.

We have outstanding commitments of £1,813,000.

Intellectual Property Rights

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if the Government will recommend extending TRIPS implementation deadlines for all developing countries. [78220]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply

The TRIPS Agreement lays down procedures for extending implementation deadlines for the Least Developed Countries (LDC). The general implementation deadline is 2005 but an extension to 2016 was agreed for pharmaceutical products at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha. There is no specific mechanism for extending TRIPS implementation deadlines for all developing countries.

The UK government works through the EU on issues relating to the TRIPS Agreement. The UK government supports the development of objective criteria to form the basis upon which extensions of TRIPS transition periods should be agreed. The UK government therefore supports the introduction into TRIPS of a mechanism for extending transition periods for individual developing countries.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Equal Pay

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister for Women, what assessment she has made of the impact of the Government's policies on reducing the disparities between men and women's pay. [78825]

Ms Hewitt: Since the Equal Pay Act was introduced in 1970, the pay gap has reduced from 37 per cent to 19 per cent. today. Action taken by the Government to close the pay gap is having a positive impact.

We are leading by example, through our commitment to equal pay reviews in the Civil Service. We are making it easier for women to get equal pay through changes in the Employment Act 2002. We are making it easier for employers to pay fairly through the work of the Fair Pay Champions and the Castle Awards. We are tackling the wider causes of the pay gap by helping mothers stay attached to the labour market, investing more resources in childcare, improving the skill levels of those already in the labour market and helping employers make the most of their female workforce.

HOME DEPARTMENT

War Memorials

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to protect war memorials in England and Wales. [80103]

Hilary Benn: With assistance from Friends of War Memorials, the Imperial War Museum, English Heritage, and others, we are tomorrow publishing a code of practice on the preservation and management of war memorials. A copy of the text is being placed on the Home Office web site and is in the Library. A leaflet will be available shortly.

Race Equality

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he will publish the third edition of Race Equality in Public Services. [80104]

Beverley Hughes: I have today placed in the Library a copy of the document "Race Equality in Public Services". The publication shows a number of areas of general improvement in public service delivery and in representation of ethnic minorities in the public sector workforce.

Smoking (Public Places)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans he has to ban smoking in public places. [77808]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Government has no plans to ban smoking in public places. Instead, we want to work with businesses and others to achieve real change, highlighting and building on best practice. We have worked closely with the hospitality trade to develop a public places charter designed to provide customers with clear information on the type of smoking policy operating in a particular establishment and allow them to make an informed choice.

Specifically aimed at local action, the Department this year has provided project funding to local tobacco control alliances to tackle health inequalities and passive smoking. Local alliances are promoting smoke free areas in workplaces and public places. These

projects will be evaluated and examples of good practice will be shared across the tobacco control alliance network.

Passports (Hong Kong)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what representations he has received from Sir James Hodge concerning the status of BNOCO BDTC passports in Hong Kong. [78874]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not received any representations from Sir James Hodge, HM Consul General in Hong Kong about the status of BN (0) passports in Hong Kong. Sir James, however, has received two approaches from the Indian Community on this subject.

Immigration Control

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans he has to improve immigration control to ensure that people coming into the United Kingdom do so in accordance with the Immigration Rules. [80101]

Beverley Hughes: The Government are firmly committed to ensuring that those who seek to migrate to the United Kingdom do so properly under the Immigration Rules, and that those who do not have such grounds are prevented from doing so.

Throughout this year there has been an increase in the number of Zimbabwe nationals who on arrival at UK ports are found to be inadmissible. Therefore, from 00.01 hours on Saturday 9 November we will require nationals of Zimbabwe to obtain visas to come to the United Kingdom. Zimbabwe nationals will also have to obtain a Direct Airside Transit Visa when they intend to remain airside while in transit through the United Kingdom.

To avoid any undue hardship for those who have already made their travel plans, we have agreed to the operation of the following grace period. From 00.01hours on 9 November to 23.59hours on 15 November, any Zimbabwe national who purchased their ticket on or before 7 November and is travelling to the UK on a direct journey from Zimbabwe, will not be refused entry solely on the basis of not holding a valid visa.

Engagements

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans he has to meet Governor Ridge, the Head of Homeland Security, on his visit to the United Kingdom, and if he will make a statement. [80102]

Mr. Blunkett: I met Governor Ridge and his staff yesterday and will have further meetings with them today for a discussion of the current terrorist threat and the measures we are both taking in response. To assist Governor Ridge, I have prepared a briefing paper on the UK dimension, a copy of which is available in the Library and on the website www.homeoffice.gov.uk/new.htm.

National Insurance Numbers

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he expects the Department of Work and Pensions to make progress in respect of delays in issuing national insurance numbers and consequent non-payment of housing benefit. [73689]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

In April 2001, the Department introduced an Enhanced National Insurance Number Process to provide more secure procedures for the allocation of national insurance numbers (NINOs) to adults living in the UK. These tighter controls combined with an increasing number of applications have regrettably led to delays in allocating permanent NINOs. Jobcentre Plus is addressing this through a national recovery plan implemented in April this year. We expect the backlog of applications to be fully cleared by March 2003.

However, the payment of Housing Benefit is not dependent on a customer having a NINO, as long as sufficient information and evidence of identity is provided for a NINO to be traced or allocated. Once the local authority is satisfied that this has been provided, and that all other conditions of entitlement have been met, Housing Benefit should be paid.

SCOTLAND

Firefighters' Strike

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what preparations she has made to ensure the safety and continuity of service to the public in the event of a firefighters' strike; and what the cost is to the Department of these actions. [77663]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my rt. hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*,columns 527W. The cost of providing emergency cover in Scotland is a matter for the Scottish Executive and will depend on the extent and nature of any industrial action.

Skills Migration

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the impact of regional gross domestic product disparity of skills migration. [79494]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government are working to increase wealth in all parts of the UK. Economic stability and sound public finances provide the foundation for rising prosperity.

The decision to migrate is affected by many factors that contribute to the quality of life.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and

(b) letters to her from hon. Members in this session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79944]

Mrs. Liddell: No parliamentary questions or letters from hon. Members remain unanswered at the end of this session.

Unemployment

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates her Department has made of the sectors which have contributed to the change in unemployment in Scotland in the last seven months. [80224]

Mrs. Liddell: Sectoral Labour Force Survey employment data are not seasonally adjusted. However, over the past year employment growth in Scotland has been driven by the Banking, Finance and Insurance sector and the Public Administration, Education and Health sector. In the last six months the main growth sectors have been Energy and Water and Agriculture and Fishing. However, performance in these sectors is affected by seasonal variation.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture Regulations

Mr. Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many regulations have been introduced in each year since 1992 related to agriculture. [80341]

Alun Michael: This information is not available in the form requested as it would involve looking at all legislation, both E.C. and UK, introduced by different Government Departments to consider whether it related to agriculture. Such information could only be assembled at disproportionate cost.

Focus Group Research

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what use she and her Department has made of focus group research since June 2001; if she will identify for each research project the topics covered, the person or organisation carrying out the research, and the total cost; and if she will publish the research on her Department's website. [74990]

Alun Michael: The Department makes use of focus group research to gain a better understanding of the public and stakeholder perception of many of its projects. Records of this type of research are not held centrally for Defra, its Executive Agencies or NDPBs and the cost of this research is normally subsumed within the total cost of a project. Further information and costs could only be obtained at a disproprtionate cost.

Below is a table of focus group research that can be identified from our records.

Research Project/ Topic	*Organisation/Person*	*Web*
Foot and Mouth Disease Focus Group Research	Andrew Irving Associates / COI	To be published on Defra Website
Public Perceptions Concerning Vaccination FMD Case Study	Professor Glynis M. Breakwell	Summary to be published on Defra Website
Improving the public awareness and understanding of flood risk.	Consortium lead by Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick Ltd	To be published on completion
The appraisal of the intangible human health related impacts of flooding	Risk and Policy Analysis Ltd	To be published on completion
Water-based Sport and Recreation—the facts	The University of Brighton	Published on Defra Website
Sustainable Development Community Issues Groups	IPPR	Decision pending
Sustainable Development Stakeholder Seminars	Green Alliance	Decision pending
Illegal Imports Campaign	Solutions Strategy Research / COI	Decision pending
Defra Corporate Identity	Bamber Forsyth-Fitch	Decision pending

Community Rail Partnerships

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department on Community Rail partnerships in rural areas in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 to date. [78396]

Alun Michael: Community Rail Partnerships are supported financially through the Rural Transport Partnership programme, administered by the Countryside Agency on behalf of Defra. The Strategic Rail Authority also allocates £12,500 per annum to Community Rail Partnerships, currently up to September 2003. Annual spending by the Countryside Agency is shown below, which includes funding to the Association of Community Rail Partnerships for providing advice on improving platforms at rural railway stations.

	Countryside Agency
2000–2001	£48,629
2001–2002	£128,634
2002–2003	£79,081 (Spent up to October 31)

Rural Expenditure

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 587W, on rural expenditure, to the hon. member for SouthEast Cornwall (Mr. Breed), how much was *(a)* available, and *(b)* spent in (i) 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and (iii) 2002–03 to date through the following, the *(A)* Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, *(B)* Local Heritage Initiative, *(C)* Support for Rights of Way,

(D) Doorstep Greens, *(E)* Millennium Greens and *(F)* Walking the Way to Health schemes, broken down by region. [79728]

Alun Michael: This information is not readily available. I have asked whether it can be collected and will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Organic Products

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what legislation governs the sale of products labelled as organic; and what bodies are responsible for *(a)* implementation of and *(b)* inspections related to such legislation. [79828]

Mr. Meacher: EC Council Regulation 2092/91 (as amended) sets out the labelling requirements, which must be used in organic farming and growing, and the inspection system, which must be put in place to ensure this.

All food sold as organic therefore must originate from growers, processors and importers who are registered with a body approved by the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS) and subject to an annual inspection by these bodies.

The sale of products labelled as organic is governed in England by The Organic Products Regulations 2001 (2001 No. 430). Local Authorities have enforcement powers to implement these Regulations.

Farm Incomes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average farm income was *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* at the most recent available date in real terms. [76465]

Mr. Morley: Expressed in real terms at 2001–02 prices, average net farm income in England was £17,400 in 1997–98, and £11,400 in 2001–02. This last figure was a forecast made last January.

The final figure for 2001–02 will be published on 28 November and the forecast for 2002–03 will be released on 30 January.

Net farm income is defined as the return to the principal farmer and spouse for their labour and on the capital of the business

Dairy Farming

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support and assistance she is providing to dairy farmers. [79226]

Mr. Morley: Annual EU expenditure on the Dairy CAP runs at almost 2 billion euro. Over the last year, mindful of the difficult market situation in the dairy sector, measures have taken in Brussels, backed by the Government, to increase support in the sector. For example, export refunds have been increased for skimmed milk powder, whole milk powder and butter to help encourage exports by making up the difference between Community and world prices. Despite this considerable expenditure, the farmgate price of milk remains below the level at which many dairy farmers can make the investment required to sustain their business. This clearly shows that the current Dairy CAP is failing farmers and is in need of reform.

We believe that a sustainable future for dairy farming is best secured through the recommendations in the Report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Food and Farming, together with the Milk Task Force Report. The Government has already announced measures to take forward some of the recommendations in the Policy Commission Report and we will publish our Sustainable Agriculture Strategy shortly. Furthermore, my noble friend Lord Whitty has convened a number of meetings of an informal dairy supply chain group, including representatives of dairy farmers, which has addressed issues of concern to those in the dairy supply chain that came out of these reports. This group is also likely to consider how the industry can best address any lessons that emerge from the ongoing KPMG study on the structure of the UK dairy sector and milk pricing, which was commissioned by the Milk Development Council.

Recycling

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has undertaken to investigate funding of doorstep recycling schemes. [79020]

Mr. Meacher: We have commissioned no specific research on this topic. However, the Strategy Unit of the Cabinet Office are currently reviewing waste issues, including the costs of delivering the diversion from landfill to which we are committed. This takes account of door-step recycling. We expect their report to be published very shortly.

Home Energy Efficiency

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment has been made by her Department of the cost and potential savings at a different initial levels of energy efficiency of property of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme; [77590]

(2) what assessment has been made by her Department of the cost effectiveness of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme in reducing fuel poverty amongst owner-occupiers and private sector tenants; [77586]

(3) what *(a)* assesment she has made, *(b)* discussions she has had or plans and *(c)* representations she has received in relation to the research conducted by the institute of Fiscal Studies on the cost-effectiveness of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme; [77591]

(4) what assessment *(a)* has been made and *(b)* is planned of the effects of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme on reducing fuel poverty (i) to date and (ii) under the fuel poverty strategy. [77589]

Mr. Meacher: The information requested will take time to collate and I will write to the hon. Member shortly. I will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will estimate how many households would be taken out of fuel poverty if their properties were to be improved by the average SAP rating achieved by Warm Front and Warm Front plus assistance; [79512]

(2) what funding *(a)* was available for the Warm Front scheme in 2001–02 and 2002–03 and *(b)* will be available in 2003–04; how such funding relates to the annual budgets set out in the statement of 30 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 765; and if she will make a statement; [79508]

(3) what research has been carried out into the match between fuel poverty and eligibility for Warm Front assistance; and if she will make a statement; [79506]

(4) which of her Department's Public Service Agreements relate to fuel poverty reduction; and what progress has been made in achieving them; [79514]

(5) what assessment has been made of the administration costs incurred by the two Warm Front scheme managers in terms of *(a)*: cost effectiveness and *(b)*: efficiency programmes; [79510]

(6) in how many cases private sector landlords have been obliged to repay costs of heating and insulation installations as a result of properties that have bene fited from Warm Front no longer being occupied by eligible tenants; [79505]

(7) what progress has been made on establishing a common definition of fuel poverty for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; [79513]

(8) what training is undertaken by individuals providing advice to households under the Warm Front scheme; and what formal qualification verifies that the adviser is a skilled and competent person; [79509]

(9) how many households are eligible for *(a)* Warm Front grants and *(b)* Warm Front plus grants; and by how many these numbers would be increased if there were to be 100 per cent take up of the qualifying benefits; [79507]

(10) what resources are expected to be expended on domestic energy efficiency improvements over the next three years through *(a)* the Warm Front Programme, *(b)* the Energy Efficiency Commitment, *(c)* capital budgets of local authorities and *(d)* Registered Social Landlord energy efficiency programmes. [79511]

Mr. Meacher: The information requested will take time to collate and I will write to my hon. Friend shortly. I will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Abattoirs

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department on supporting small and medium sized abattoirs in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 to date, broken down by category of support. [78403]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* Information relating specifically to small and medium sized abattoirs is not readily available without incurring a disproportionate cost. However, actual spending and spending in the pipeline (2002–2003 to date) on the abattoir sector is as follows:

£'000s (to nearest thousand)

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03 to date*
Rural Enterprise Scheme	—	—	6
Processing and Marketing Grant	—	27	516
Agricultural Development Scheme	11	—	—

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she received the latest annual report from the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee; what response she has made; and what plans she has to make changes to its membership. [80348]

Mr. Meacher: The Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee's 2002 annual report was supplied on 30 October 2002. No response has yet been made to it. The Managing Radioactive Waste Safely consultation paper considered possible changes in the Government's advisory machinery in the radioactive waste management area. Future membership needs of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee have yet to be decided in light of the outcome of that review.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the list of prospective sites for the disposal of radioactive waste drawn up by NIREX. [80097]

Mr. Meacher: There is no current list of prospective sites for the disposal of radioactive waste drawn up by NIREX. Any such historical list does not have any bearing at all on current considerations of disposal policy.

Weeds Act

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the amount of ragwort growing in the UK; and if she will propose amendments to the Weeds Act 1959 to include commercial equine activities. [80333]

Alun Michael: Defra has provided funding totalling £420,000 to underpin the preparation of The New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora. This divides the country into ten by ten kilometre squares and charts the distribution of plants, including Ragwort across Britain and Ireland. The New Atlas, which was published in September, shows that the general distribution of Ragwort has not changed since the 1962 Atlas was prepared.

Under the Weeds Act 1959, primary responsibility for weed control rests with the occupier of the land on which the weeds are growing. Where there is a risk that one of the five injurious weeds to which the Act applies might spread, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs can serve a notice on the occupier of

the land requiring action to be taken to prevent its spread. Under section 1 of the Act the authority to serve a notice applies to any land.

Defra will consider all complaints about the spread of weeds but in determining what action to take, priority is given to those complaints where there is a threat to farmland or land that is being used for the keeping of horses as part of a diversified farm business.

Parliamentary Questions/Correspondence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to her from hon. Members in the current session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79938]

Alun Michael: My Department anticipates answering all parliamentary questions that have been tabled during this session by the rising of the House today.

The Cabinet Office publishes a report to Parliament on an annual basis, setting out the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May, *Official Report*, column 677W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

The table below shows the number of letters in my department which had not received an answer at 5 November.

With a Received Date Between	*Number*
1 & 2 months	135
2 & 3 months	138
3 & 4 months	69
4 & 6 months	64
greater than 6 months	119

Plant Health Directive

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on Directive 2002/36/EC (OJ L116, 3 May 2002) as it relates to measures in the United Kingdom; and in what circumstances, as per Recital 8, *(a)* applicant states and *(b)* OCTs are included as European states for political definitions. [77249]

Mr. Meacher: Directive 2002/36/EC amends the technical annexes to the Plant Health Directive (2000/29/EC) to provide better protection against the introduction into, and spread within, the EC of a number of serious pests and disease of plants. Three new pests are added to the list of those which are prohibited. The scope of the plant passport regime, which governs movements of plants within the Community, and the scope of import controls on plants from outside the EC, are extended to reflect more accurately the wide range of host plants attacked by some listed pests. The amendment also strengthens measures to ensure that plants are free from Bemisia tabaci before entering the area recognised as a "protected zone" for that pest (which includes the whole of the UK). Directive 2002/36/EC will be implemented in the UK by amendments to the Plant Health (Great Britain) Order 1993 and the Plant Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.

Decisions on listing countries and regions in the Annexes of the Plant Health Directive are based on their plant health status. In the case of Malta and Cyprus the ranges of plant pests and diseases which occur in those countries are known to be similar to those of continental Europe. Conversely the EC Overseas Countries and Territories are treated separately from European territories, according to Article 1.1 of the Plant Health Directive, because of the different pest risks in those territories.

Agricultural Wages Board

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to abolish the Agricultural Wages Board; and if she will make a statement. [79244]

Alun Michael: No.

ARBRE Energy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is towards the recovery of grants paid to ARBRE Energy in respect of the Eggborough power station. [76844]

Margaret Beckett: Under the Energy Crops Scheme, grants to plant crops are payable to growers. In the case of crops to provide fuel for the ARBRE power station, the Department was asked by the growers to make the payments to ARBRE Energy. The scheme requires that crops are used to produce energy, and the Department would be required to consider recovering grant from growers where crops are used for other purposes. It is too early to consider this as discussions on the future of ARBRE are continuing. In addition, if it does become necessary, the Department will work closely with growers to access the alternative energy markets which are being developed.

British Cattle Movement Service

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigation she has made of delays in sending out claims forms by the British Cattle Movement Service; and if she will make a statement. [79280]

Alun Michael: The British Cattle Movement service does not send out any claim forms. Its work does not involve directly the processing or payment of subsidy claims. The orgnisation deals only with the registration and tracing of cattle and when a fully correct birth registration is received, I understand that the organisation issues cattle passports the next day.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her most recent estimate is of annual emissions of carbon dioxide in the UK; and what the level was in 1997. [77461]

Mr. Meacher: The UK's carbon dioxide emissions in 2000, the last year for which confirmed data are available, were 152.1 million tonnes of carbon, compared to 152.5 million tonnes of carbon in 1997. A provisional estimate of carbon dioxide emissions for 2001, based on energy use, was published by the Department for Trade and Industry in March in its "Energy Trends" publication. This estimated that carbon dioxide emissions were 154.4 million tonnes of carbon, approximately 6 per cent. below the UK's 1990 baseline emissions of 164.4 million tonnes of carbon.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what future reductions in CO_2 emissions are expected by 2010 as a result of Government policy in *(a)* the domestic sector, *(b)* transport, *(c)* industrial sector, *(d)* the tertiary sector, *(e)* the public sector and *(f)* other changes. [77463]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have estimated that the additional policies and measures in the UK climate change programme, published in November 2000, could by 2010 reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the domestic sector by at least 7.8 million tonnes of carbon; in the transport sector by 5.7 million tonnes of carbon; in the business sector, which includes both the industry and commerce, by at least 4.5 million tonnes of carbon; and in the public sector by at least 0.5 million tonnes of carbon. Other policies, which includes afforestation and those policies that cut across sectors, could achieve further savings of 2.6 million tonnes of carbon.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will commission an independent analysis of the likelihood of current Government policies being able to deliver a 20 per cent. cut in CO_2 by 2010; and if she will make a statement. [77467]

Mr. Meacher: It is estimated that the quantified policies and measures identified in the climate change programme could lead to a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of 19 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. Carbon savings, which have not been quantified, from additional policies in the programme, could help us achieve our domestic goal. There will be a formal review of the climate change programme in 2004, which will be an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of existing policies and, if necessary, to develop new ones.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what her assessment is of the change in carbon dioxide emissions that will result from households switching to digital television and the use of set-top boxes; [77475]

(2) what progress has been made *(a)* on the Government sustainability index on climate change and *(b)* towards the Government's domestic target for a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions based on 1990 levels; and if she will make a statement. [77462]

Mr. Meacher: *(a)* The latest figures for the Headline Sustainable Development Indicator for Climate Change were published in a Defra Statistical Press Release on 28 March. Emissions of the 'basket' of six greenhouse gases covered by the Kyoto Protocol, weighted by global warming potential, fell by 13.2 per cent. between the 1990 base year and 2000, the last year for which confirmed data are available. There was no change between 1999 and 2000. The UK has a target under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008–12. We remain on course to achieve this target.

(b) A provisional estimate of carbon dioxide emissions for 2001, based on energy use, was published by the Department for Trade and Industry in March in its Energy Trends publication. This estimated that carbon dioxide emissions were 154.4 million tonnes of carbon, approximately 6 per cent. below the UK's 1990 baseline emissions of 164.4 million tonnes of carbon.

Cold Sector (Energy Efficiency)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what Energy Efficiency Index targets have been set for the United Kingdom cold sector as part of the market transformation programme; and what role has been played by the Department in *(a)* setting and *(b)* meeting the targets. [77556]

Mr. Meacher: The Market Transformation Programme (MTP) does not itself set targets, but operating largely in the public domain, seeks to establish and maintain an informed consensus on the risks, potential and scope for achieving sustainable beneficial market changes over time (e.g. increased volume sales of energy efficient appliances or elimination of inefficient products by specified dates) and, in parallel, on the detailed policy measures and other actions necessary to achieve those changes, taking into account underlying trends, timing and wider issues. In that regard, my Department both sponsors and participates in MTP's open consultations on feasible market transformation targets and it seeks to negotiate integrated programmes of policy measures to meet them. These include, for example, EU directives to label and to set minimum standards for domestic refrigeration, voluntary agreements with industry on improvement targets, public domain product procurement information, the promotional programmes supported by the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust, including the Energy Efficiency Recommended scheme, the Energy Efficiency Commitment and Enhanced Capital Allowances.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* discussions she has had, *(b)* representations she has received and *(c)* meetings she has attended in relation to energy efficiency improvements by the cold sector. [77558]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has on-going dialogue with business and other stakeholders on the potential for energy savings in the cold sector and on the practical strategies and policy measures that could help deliver these. In particular, discussions have taken place and representations received from business, enforcement agencies and other EU member states under the aegis of the Energy Efficiency Partnership, the Market Transformation programme, and in response to formal consultations on such matters as EU mandatory energy labelling and voluntary industry agreements. Recently,

my officials have attended meetings held by the Energy Saving Trust, the Market Transformation Programme, and by the European Commission.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to reply to the letter dated 4 March from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding his constituent, Mr. A. Rogers of Banff. [50074]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* I am sorry that the hon. Member has not yet received a response to his letter. I have asked that this be looked at as a matter or urgency so that I may reply shortly.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the letter of the hon. Member for Hexham of 25 April, ref 168998. [65643]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* I am sorry that the hon. Member has not yet received a response to his letter. I have asked that this be looked at as a matter of urgency so that I may reply shortly.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will answer the letters of 11 June and 13 August from the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Borders on behalf of Mrs. J. Kerr of Wigton, Cumbria. [77551]

Alun Michael: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be responding to this letter shortly.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the budget for the Countryside Agency is for 2002–03; and how it is allocated among the Agency's main projects. [79060]

Alun Michael: The Agency's total budget for 2002–03 is £93 million. Its main projects, including Vital Villages, are as follows (with estimated programme spend this year):

	£ million
Market Towns	2.49
Rural Transport Fund	10.11
Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund	4.8
Local Heritage Initiative	1.68
Support for Rights of Way	1.35
Doorstep Greens	1.24
Millennium Greens	0.44
Walking the Way to Health	1.42

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the next review of the Countryside Agency's funding will be. [79061]

Alun Michael: Funding for the work of the Countryside Agency is decided as part of the corporate planning process.

Energy Policy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the White Paper on Energy Policy. [77476]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

I plan to publish the Energy White Paper in the New Year.

Farm Mapping

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what procedure will be followed if farmers disagree with field size calculated by digital mapping. [78746]

Alun Michael: Farmers are being given the opportunity to check and agree the areas digitised. If they are unable to agree with the field size calculated, they will be asked to provide evidence in the form of a suitably qualified surveyors report to support the size that they believe it to be.

GM Fish

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the continuing development of GM fish. [77306]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The release and marketing of GMOs in the EU is governed by European Directive 2001/18/EC. In England, Directive 2001/18 is implemented by part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 2002. The devolved Administrations for Scotland and Wales are responsible for implementing Directive 2001/18 in their respective territories.

The above legislation covers any proposed release of GM fish into the environment for research or commercial purposes, including any proposed release of GM fish in nets, tanks or cages in the sea or in rivers, lakes or streams. Before any such release could go ahead, it would have to be authorised by a consent from the relevant authority. Decisions on whether or not to allow a release would be based on a detailed assessment of any risks that may be posed by the GMO to human health or the environment in each case. It is difficult to envisage any circumstance in which a release of GM fish would be authorised in England.

There are no GM fish being held in aquatic net-pens in the UK and no approval has yet been sought or granted for the commercial production of GM fish.

The Department for International Development is funding research on GM techniques that may accelerate the growth rate and confer sterility in tilapia, a freshwater fish widely farmed in Africa and Asia. This work is being carried out by the University of Southampton in strictly controlled contained tank conditions in accordance with GMO (contained use) legislation. It is designed to provide a better understanding of how poor producers and consumers in developing countries could benefit, and to help these countries to decide for themselves whether they want to use the techniques.

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At the fifth North Sea Conference at Bergen in March 2002, Ministers also agreed to take all possible actions in accordance with the requirements of Directive 2001/18/EC and comparable national legislation, to ensure that the culture of genetically modified marine organisms is confined to secure, self-contained, land-based facilities in order to prevent their release to the marine environment.

Halons

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has undertaken to ascertain whether halons from fire-extinguishing systems made illegal after 2003 should be *(a)* destroyed and *(b)* recycled to critical users. [77562]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* In October 1998, WS Atkins and the Halon Users National Consortium (HUNC) produced a report for the former DETR entitled, "Assessment of the Use of Halon in the United Kingdom". This estimated that about 81 tonnes of Halon 1211 and about 238 tonnes of Halon 1301 would be decommissioned from fire-extinguishing systems by the end of 2004. Assumptions made by the consultants estimated that about 20 per cent. of the Halon 1211 and about 60 per cent. of the Halon 1301 would be recycled. The remainder would be destroyed.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tonnes of Halons remain in service in the United Kingdom, and of this tonnage, how much comprises *(a)* H1301 and *(b)* H1211. [77564]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* In 2000, the European Commission produced "A Strategy for the Management and Elimination of the Use of Halons in the European Community". For the UK, it was estimated that 300–315 tonnes of Halon 1301 and 162 tonnes of Halon 1211 were installed in fire-extinguishing systems. In addition, it was estimated that 400 tonnes of Halon 1310 and 180 tonnes of Halon 1211 were held in stock.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to ensure atmospherically friendly products are being promoted as a preferable option to fire extinguishing systems which contain HFCs. [77565]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The Government issued the UK Climate Change Programme in November 2000, and its publication was widely publicised. The programme sets out the key elements of the Government's policy on HFCs to enable industry and users to make investment decisions with more certainty. These elements include that HFCs should only be used where other safe, technically feasible, cost-effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives do not exist, and that HFCs are not sustainable in the long term. The Government have a voluntary agreement with the UK fire-fighting industry in order to reduce emissions of HFCs and PFCs, which is currently under review.

In May 2001, jointly with the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department issued guidance to the industry and users entitled, "Phase out of Halons: Advice on Alternatives and Guidelines for Users of Fire Fighting and Explosion Protection Systems". The guidance suggests a range of alternatives to ozone-depleting halons, including systems using water, carbon dioxide and foams.

Household Waste

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times a week she recommends household rubbish collections should take place; and what measures are in place to ensure that such collections take place. [77007]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Section 45 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 places a duty on each waste collection authority to arrange for the collection of household waste in its area. It is up to each authority to decide on the most appropriate method and frequency of collection, and the resources required.

The waste collection authority will need to monitor the service to ensure that it is delivered in the manner they have prescribed. Ultimately, a waste collection authority can be referred to the local authority ombudsman if it is deemed to be failing to fulfil its statutory duty in this area.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many local authorities have systems for recycling household waste from the doorstep; where they are located; and what plans there are to introduce doorstep recycling in all authorities. [77006]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* We are clear that there needs to be a significant increase in kerbside recycling. We have provided significant extra funds to local authorities through the standard spending assessment and a separate ring-fenced fund for recycling and waste minimisation. We are currently assessing the second tranche of bids for funding from that budget. The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit is currently reviewing waste strategy and its funding and is due to report shortly.

The following 288 local authorities reported that they undertook some form of kerbside recycling scheme in the 2000–01 Municipal Waste Management Survey.

Market Transformation Programme

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library copies of the minutes from meetings of the Market Transformation Programme, attended by her Department. [77557]

Mr. Meacher: The Market Transformation Programme works by engaging with stakeholders who have policy interests across a range of product and service sectors, mainly by exposing its analysis of issues and illustrative strategies to public scrutiny and open consultation, and doing this largely through internet communication. From time to time the contractors who service this programme for the Department hold meetings with experts and other interested parties (eg. from business, NGOs, research organisations and Government Departments) to help build consensus on

the relevant data and analysis. No formal minutes are made of such discussions, but the outcomes of all consultations are reflected in updates to the documented analysis, the position papers and the programme action plans, which are all published for the Department on the programme's public domain website, www.mtprog.com. In addition, the Department holds meetings concerned with the steering and management of the programme's work, as distinct from its content. These meetings are minuted and I will arrange for copies of the minutes and supporting papers covering the most recent meeting to be placed in the Library of the House.

Peninsular Proteins Ltd.

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will make a decision in respect of an appeal by Peninsular Proteins Ltd. against a refusal to grant a licence to operate their rendering plant at Great Torrington; and if she will make a statement. [78201]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* A letter, outlining the decision which the Department proposes to make in respect of the appeal by Peninsular Proteins Ltd., will be sent shortly.

Plastic Products

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has for reducing householders' use of plastic products that are not biodegradeable. [70257]

Mr. Meacher: We are concerned that re-use and recycling of plastic remains very low and that non-biodegradeable plastic remains in and litters the environment almost indefinitely. A substitute for plastic made from potato starch is now being developed, which is being used for some types of packaging by some retailers. Such material is entirely biodegradeable and can be composted. A number of companies are marketing degradeable plastics technology and products manufactured from these materials. These new technologies are based on modified plastics manufactured from mineral oil and still have to be sent for recycling after use. But we do strongly support the development of boidegradeable plastics made from non-fossil sources.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultation she is undertaking on the introduction of a charge for plastic bags given out in shops; and if she will make a statement. [79638]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Taxes are a matter for the Chancellor.

Sellafield Discharges

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,what action will be taken to eliminate the discharges of Technetium-99 from Sellafield into the Irish Sea. [77599]

Mr. Meacher: Following a decision in 1999 to reduce the technetium-99 discharge limit from 200 TBq/year to 90 TBq/year, Ministers requested the Environment Agency to carry out a review of technetium-99 discharges from Sellafield. The Agency published its proposed decision concerning these discharges on 20 September 2001 and set out various actions that, subject to technical problems being overcome, and HOUSE being content about the safety implications, could be undertaken to reduce the current technetium-99 discharge limit to 10 TBq/year by 2006. The Agency's proposed decision is currently under consideration by the Secretaries of State for Health and for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who jointly have the decision-making responsibilities in this area. We expect that their response to the Agency's proposals will be published shortly.

SF6 Emissions

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how her Department regulates the use of SF_6 and its emissions in electricity transmission and distribution in the United Kingdom. [77567]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The Government do not regulate the use of SF_6 from the electricity transmission and distribution sectors. Emissions from electrical insulation currently account for less than 20 per cent. of the UK's total emissions of SF_6. While there has been a small increase in emissions from this sector since 1995, and they are forecast to continue increasing until 2010, estimated emissions reduction in other sectors are projected to offset this increase and lead to a fall in total SF_6 emissions of about 3 per cent. between 1995 and 2020.

Sustainable Development

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* assessment has been made and *(b)* discussions have taken place, or are planned by her Department, of the political declarations emerging from the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg from (i) the Inter-Parliamentary Union, (ii) local government groups and (iii) regional government groups. [77561]

Mr. Meacher: The relevant declarations are (i) the declarations by parliamentarians at the session organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU); (ii) the declaration by local government representatives at the session organised by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI); and (iii) the declaration by regional government representatives at the regional government event (known as the Gauteng Declaration).

We are in the process of assessing the contents of these declarations, and will discuss their implications with the relevant stakeholders, including how they might contribute to sustainable development in the UK.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has had with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in relation to the role of local government in the delivery of objectives agreed at the

recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg; and what the outcomes of the discussions have been. [77563]

Mr. Meacher: Discussions have begun with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and other Government Departments about how to take forward the UK's commitments from WSSD at the local, national and international level. There are many aspects to consider and we anticipate these discussions continuing for some time.

We will be launching a major review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy in the new year. We will use this opportunity to consult stakeholders, including local authorities, on action to implement the Johannesburg commitments across the UK.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the UK did not have a stand at the Umbuntu Village and the NASREC exhibition space at the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [77569]

Mr. Meacher: After careful consideration, the UK Government decided not to have a stand at Umbuntu Village as we believed that the benefits to be gained from exhibitioning did not justify the use of the limited human and financial resources we had available.

NASREC was the location for the Global People's Forum, which ran in parallel to the main summit, and was a forum for all forms of civil society to coalesce and discuss sustainable development. It was not a forum for Governments to exhibit. I visited it during the WSSD Conference and spent half a day there. I also visited Umbuntu Village twice.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken to develop national coalitions to assist in the delivery of *(a)* outcomes of the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and *(b)* additional non-binding agreements or pledges made by the UK Government relating to the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [77578]

Mr. Meacher: The United Kingdom Government are co-operating with like-minded Governments, both bilaterally and through international institutions such as the United Nations, European Union and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to assist the delivery of the outcomes of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and related non-binding commitments which it has made.

Such co-operation will not necessarily involve the development of publicly identified 'coalitions'. However, at Johannesburg the EU member states and a number of like-minded countries, commonly referred to as the 'Renewable Energy Coalition', made a declaration on "The Way Forward for Renewable Energy". This commits us to work together to further develop and promote renewable energy technologies and substantially increase the global share of renewable energy resources; and to work with others to achieve this goal, especially through partnership initiatives and through forthcoming international conferences.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to *(a)* attend and *(b)* support events relating to outcomes of the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [77595]

Mr. Meacher: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is committed to follow-up the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) both at a national and international level. Within the UK, Defra is supporting numerous events on the outcomes of WSSD, these include stakeholder meetings to discuss follow-up action in the UK, a Conservation Foundation workshops on WSSD looking at the local dimension, the Royal Institute of International Affairs General Meeting on the outcomes of WSSD, a DEMOS seminar on sustainable business and a keynote speech by my right hon. Friend the Secondary of State for Defra on the outcomes of WSSD at the Associate Parliamentary Environment Group Christmas reception.

The Department is also committed to attending numerous international meetings, particularly at EU and UN level, relating to the outcomes of WSSD.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which individuals and organisations who were consulted by her Department in relation to *(a)* Prepcom meetings and discussions relating to the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg; and *(b)* the negotiations and involvement of the UK Government delegation at the World Summit. [77573]

Mr. Meacher: The Department for Environment, Food and rural Affairs (Defra) worked closely with various stakeholder groups in our preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Consultations with civil society were through umbrella organisations such as UNED-UK and the BOND Network (British Overseas NGOs for Development).

Defra engaged with the business community and the Prime Minister instigated five sectoral initiatives in March 2001, which were partnerships for the delivery of sustainable development between Government, civil society. Stakeholders groups, including NGOs, local authorities and business were invited to be part of the delegation at the Prepcoms and at the summit itself.

Negotiations at the summit were inter-governmental. However, daily UK delegation meetings and regular briefing sessions with civil society enabled non-governmental stakeholders to feed in their views.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to *(a)* develop a system for monitoring of and *(b)* produce guidelines for Type II agreements relating to the delivery of objectives relating to the delivery of (i) sustainable development and (ii) outcomes of the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [77576]

Mr. Meacher: Defra negotiators were instrumental in the development and adoption by the UN of a set of guiding principles for Type II partnerships at the fourth Preparatory Committee meeting for WSSD in Indonesia in May this year. We also fought extremely hard for the inclusion of relevant text in the Plan of Implementation agreed at Johannesburg, with the result that the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) has been mandated to develop a follow-up mechanism for partnerships.

Domestically, a policy lead has been identified for each of those Type II partnerships in which the UK Government are involved. These include officials from FCO, Forestry Commission, DfID and DTI in addition to Defra.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list Type II agreements in place relating to the delivery of *(a)* sustainable development and *(b)* outcomes of the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [77577]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the UN website for the World Summit on Sustainable Development which lists more than 600 Type II partnerships (http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/partnership_initiatives.html).

The UK Government instigated or was involved in more than 20 partnerships developed for WSSD. Those that were registered as formal Type II partnerships are:

UK-led Water Partnership—Partners For Water and Sanitation (PAWS)

UK-led Sustainable Tourism Initiative (STI)

EU Water Initiative—Water for Life

EU Energy Initiative—'Energy for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development'

Global Village energy Partnership (GVEP)

Global Network on Energy for Sustainable Development

Partnership For Principle 10 (Environmental Democracy)

Oceans Initiative: "White Water to Blue Water: A Crosscutting Approach to Regional Oceans and Coastal Ecosystem Management"

Congo Basin Forest Partnership

Japanese led Asian Forest Partnership

Details of these, and the other partnerships in which we are involved, are available on the Government sustainable development website (http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/wssd/).

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent measures her Department has taken to ensure that the National Building Standards (Government Works) standard has been amended to reflect Government policy on timber procurement; and if she will make a statement. [77673]

Mr. Meacher: My officials contacted the National Building Specification, a trading name of RIBA Enterprises Ltd., on 1 October drawing their attention to the timber scoping study report (published on the internet at http://www.forestforum.org.uk), and asking them to consider reviewing the NBS (Government Works) standard format to reflect Government policy on its own timber procurement. The Government committed Departments and their agencies in July 2000 actively to seek to procure their timber and timber products from legal and sustainably managed sources.

The National Building Specification does not contain specification clauses for the procurement of timber. It is left to the specifier to decide the content of the specification because currently, NBS considers the issue of sustainability complex, imprecise and the subject of conflicting information. However, general guidance to the National Building Specification refers to advice from the Forests Forever Campaign, that was established in 1990 by the Timber Trade Federation. This says: ". . . as yet there is no internationally agreed definition of, or accepted criteria for, 'sustainability'. At present a supplier may only be able to provide evidence that timber comes from a 'sustained yield' source i.e. managed to provide a continuous supply of timber . . .".

NBS is compiling a dossier on the subject of timber procurement and has agreed to meet officials to discuss the issue. In the meantime, we have asked Government Departments to ensure that anyone employed by Government on any construction, maintenance or supplies contract is made aware that the Government's policy on timber procurement should be complied with when drawing up specifications. This message will be reinforced by an Information Note to be issued by the Office of Government Commerce shortly.

Veterinary Surgeons and Students

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many unqualified people have been found guilty of impersonating a veterinary *(a)* surgeon and *(b)* student in each of the last 10 years. [76615]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 October 2002]: (a)* Two. The first in 2001 and the second in 2002. *(b)* None.

Village Halls

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to improve funding arrangements for village halls; and if she will make a statement. [78435]

Alun Michael: Central funding for village halls, from the recent Government and the National Lottery has increased substantially in recent years. About £10 million per year was available in the 1980s, which increased to around £50 million per year in the late 1990s, largely due to the contribution from the Millennium Fund which funded over 500 village halls and community centres to the value of nearly £100 million. That programme was specifically intended as an injection of extra funds over the millennium period and has benefited many local communities. Since the millennium the annual assistance to village halls remains three times the previous level at approximately £33 million per year now.

It must be remembered that the finances of village halls have traditionally come from local sources with come support from central government and that this Government have been active in encouraging local

action. While this approach has been productive the contribution of central government must not be seen as an alternative to local leadership and fund raising.

Nevertheless the Government are working with stakeholders to quantify the funding needs of village halls and how best to meet these needs. My officials met representatives of Action with Communities in Rural England and others on 22 October to discuss how available funds, from central and local government and the lottery distributors, can best support local investment in village halls and the services and facilities they provide for their local communities. I shall be meeting the National Village Halls Forum during November.

Waste Dumping

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regulations there are and how they can be enforced by *(a)* the Environment Agency and *(b)* local councils, to prevent developers dumping contaminated waste on sites that are being recontoured and are not licensed tips. [77241]

Mr. Meacher: The disposal and recovery of waste is regulated primarily through the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994, for which the Environment Agency is the competent authority and primary regulator. Paragraph 9 of schedule 3 of the 1994 regulations allows certain types of material to be spread to land for the purposes of reclamation or improvement under an exemption from waste management licensing. This material includes soil, rock, ash or sludge, or waste from any dredging of inland waters or arising from construction or demolition work. The material can only be spread provided it meets the requirements of Article 4 of the Waste Framework Directive ie to ensure protection of the environment and human health.

Any activity being carried out under this exemption must be registered with the Environment Agency, and failure to adhere to the 'general rules' of the exemption is an offence that is punishable by a fine if convicted in court.

The Government will be consulting shortly on amendments to some exemptions (including paragraph 9). These amendments are being designed to tighten the requirements and to prevent abuse of the controls.

Along with the Environment Agency, local authorities have more general powers under section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to fly tipping, ie depositing controlled waste without a waste management licence ore registered exemption. In the event of a conviction, severe penalties are available to the courts including an unlimited fine or imprisonment of up to five years.

Waste Incinerators

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many waste incinerators are planned by waste disposal authorities; what the capacity is of each incinerator planned; and what information she collates on the contractual arrangements for waste disposal. [77745]

Mr. Meacher: There are at present 14 municipal solid waste incinerators in the whole of the UK, two of which are in Scotland. Details of facilities where planning applications are determined by local planning authorities are not held centrally.

There are many hundreds of other incinerators for sewage sludge, hazardous waste, clinical waste, production waste from factories etc. In England and Wales, the larger plant generally is regulated by the Environment Agency and details of their locations are available on the Environment Agency's public register. Other plant that is part of another process regulated by the Agency may not be shown separately on the register. Smaller plant is regulated by local authorities. In Scotland, all such plant are regulated by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency.

A new plant will need planning permission to start construction and a PPC permit to start operations. The table gives the number and status, as at 21 August 2002, of new municipal waste incineration plants in England and Wales. The table contains information shared with the Environment Agency by prospective applicants for pollution control permits. There may also be other planning applications or amendments which have been submitted to local authorities over which the Agency has not been consulted. The planning status may have been changed since the data were supplied.

The Department does not routinely collect information on contractual arrangements for waste disposal. It is the responsibility of waste disposal authorities to make appropriate contractual arrangements with respect to their requirements for waste disposal.

Operator	*Location*	*Size: t/yr*	*Planning status*	*Permit status*
NEWLINCS Developments	Grimsby	56,000	Granted	IPC authorised—PPC application to be submitted
Onyx	Portsmouth	165,000	Granted after appeal	IPC authorised—PPC application expected this year
Onyx	Marchwood, Southampton	160,000	Granted	IPC authorised—PPC application being determined
Surrey Waste Management	Capel, Surrey	116,000	Granted, but subject to judicial review	PPC permit issued
Grundons	Slough	400,000	Granted	IPC authorised—PPC application expected
Onyx	Chineham, Surrey	110,000	Granted	PPC permit issued
HLC Waste Management Services	Neath, Port Talbot	85,000	Granted	PPC permit issued
Waste Recycling Group	Hull	150,000	Application refused—planning appeal in	PPC permit issued

Operator	Location	Size: t/yr	Planning status	Permit status
			progress	
Kent Enviropower	Maidstone, Kent	500,000	Granted	PPC permit being determined
Riverside Resource Recovery	Belvedere, London	500,000	Refused	IPC authorised
Shanks	Milton Keynes	353,000	Application submitted	PPC application to be submitted if planning permission granted
Onyx	Sheffield	225,000	Application submitted	PPC application determined
Sita	Ridham Dock, Kent	200,000	Subject to a planning appeal	No application
County Environment Services	Roche, Cornwall	64,000	Application submitted	No application

Web Sites

Dr. Vincent Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the web site links associated with her Department, including sites now dormant or closed, and indicating whether they are live, dormant or closed; what the start up costs were for each site listed; what the operating costs were in each year since start up for each site; which company hosted each site; what assessment takes place for each site; which company does the assessment; if she will place the assessment reports in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [75590]

Alun Michael: In addition to its overall strategic functions, Defra has a range of specialist responsibilities in the fields of environment, food, animal welfare, agriculture and rural policy. Website links therefore range from small or specialist sites established by the Department (or its predecessors) and its agencies and NDPBs for specific purposes to DEFRA's own main website and those of its agencies and NDPBs. We are also checking whether joint sites have been established with other organisations by operational units within Defra or within its agencies and NDPBs.

The information requested is currently being collated. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Children in Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what action she is taking to raise the educational standards of children in care. [73928]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* We are committed to raising the educational standards of all children, including those who are in care, in order to build a fair and inclusive society. In May 2000 we issued comprehensive Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Care to help local authorities, in their role as corporate parents to raise the educational attainment of children and young people in public care and to bring them closer in line with those of their peers. The Department seeks through it's policies to help LEAs work towards achieving the PSA target set by the Department of Health that, by 2004, 15 per cent. of children leaving care at age 16 or over shall have achieved at least 5 GCCEs at grade A*-C.

The Guidance is backed up by an Implementation Programme, Education Protects, which is jointly supported by the DfES and the Department of Health. Currently, a team of advisors work with ten networks of Lead Officers for Children in Public Care across the country.

The Implementation Team is also gathering examples of best practice to help inform future work locally and nationally. Examples of best practice will shortly be disseminated through the upgraded Education Protects DfES website.

We are currently consulting on a revised School Admissions Code of Practice that will require all admission authorities in their over subscription criteria, to give top priority to looked after children, after children with statements of special educational needs.

For 2002–03 there is £10 million in the DfES Standards Fund to raise the achievement for children in public care and sick children. A new £20 million Capital Modernisation Fund scheme to increase access to information technology for children in and leaving care is available over the 2 financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04. The money is being distributed as part of the Department of Health's Quality Protects programme. This is on top of the overall budget of £885 million made available over 5 years for the Department of Health's children's services quality protects grant.

The Social Exclusion Unit are are currently undertaking a project looking into the educational achievement of children in public care. We will be considering any recommendations made when their report is published. This is currently expected to be in December 2002.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what preparations she has made to ensure the safety and continuity of service to the public in the event of a firefighters' strike; and what the cost is to the Department of these actions. [77656]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department has set up an Incident Team representing all policy and services directorates led by a senior Board member. The Team is liaising closely with central Government to keep abreast of updates on the situation outlined by my right hon. Friend, the Ministery for Local Government and the Regions in his answer to this question of the 28 October 2002 *Official Report*, column 527W. Briefing has been circulated to all Local Education Authorities, colleges and universities. Further communications will be sent as appropriate. Risk Assessments have also been carried out on departmental premises and specific measures introduced to safeguard people – which include large numbers of visitors as well as staff – on strike days.

The cost of providing emergency cover will depend on the extent and nature of any industrial action.

Ethnicity Statistics

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how ethnicity is measured by schools and local education authorities and what checks are carried out to ensure the accuracy of those figures. [78609]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In January this year the Department issued to LEAs updated guidance on how schools should obtain and record pupils' ethnic group. This guidance was prompted in part by a new ethnic group classification introduced by the 2001 national Census of Population, which meant that all existing information had to be re-collected on this new basis. The main features of the guidance are:

once the re-collection exercise is complete, information for new pupils to be collected on first entry to school, and then passed on from school to school;

information to be collected via parents, who, in the case of pupils aged 11 or over, are encouraged to involve the pupil in the decision;

any refusal to provide information must be respected. However if a parent merely fails to respond to the school's enquiries, the school may, subject to certain conditions, ascribe an ethnic group based on its own best judgement. In these cases the fact that the information has been derived in this way, rather than provided by the parent or pupil, must be recorded;

LEAs have discretion to adopt a more detailed ethnic group classification where necessary to meet local monitoring needs (within a framework specified by the Department).

The steps taken to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained and recorded by schools under the new guidance are:

the guidance was drawn up following extensive discussions with the Commission for Racial Equality and the Information Commissioner, and a major consultation exercise involving (amongst others) the teacher unions, LEAs and a sample of schools;

great emphasis has been placed on the need for LEAs to take the lead in ensuring that their schools iinplemented the guidance fully and correctly, and have all the advice and support necessary to enable them to do so;

each LEA has been asked to nominate and notify the Department of a senior officer within authority who will take overall responsibility for implementation of the guidance, and all authorities have now done so. Feedback on progress has been obtained through these contacts, and further guidance or clarification issued as required;

an explanatory leaflet (with translations into 14 languages) has been produced by the Department for distribution by schools to parents. A model letter and completion form for parents has also been provided for schools' use;

a dedicated website (www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities) has been set up through which all guidance and key documents (including translations) can be viewed and downloaded;

LEAs have been required to submit to the Department for approval any refinements of the national ethnic categories which they propose to adopt for local monitoring purposes in order to ensure that consistency of data at national level is maintained;

the Department has worked very closely with the suppliers of management information systems to schools and LEAs to ensure these systems are developed in order to store and process the new data correctly, and enable it to be transferred electronically from school to school as pupils move.

The new information will be collected by the Department for the first time in the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) taking place in January 2003. These data will be analysed closely to verify that they accord with the guidance. Any apparent gaps or anomalies will be taken up with the LEA concerned.

Connexions Card

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what the estimated annual cost is of the Connexions card; and what the card has cost so far. [79123]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* The Connexions Card contract is valued at £109.7m over seven years.

Due to the agreed implementation plan the annual cost of the Card is not a fixed amount per annum. The £109.7m is spread as follows (these figures are subject to annual review);

Financial Year	*01-02*	*02-03*	*03-4*	*04-5*	*05 6*	*06-7*	*07-8*	*08-9*
Annual Budget (£m)	14.5	15.5	14.5	14.0	13.6	13.6	13.1	10.9

To date, the Card has cost £18.9m.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, which third party organisations and companies have *(a)* received and *(b)* bought information contained on the Connexions card. [79124]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* Only the Connexions Service has received information contained on the Connexions Card. No third party organisation or company has bought information contained on the Connexions Card.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, whether information held on individuals who have Connexions cards has been passed on to third parties *(a)* for no consideration and *(b)* for a consideration. [79125]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* Only the Connexions Service has been passed information held on individuals who have Connexions Cards and this is for no consideration. No information held on individuals who have a Connexions Card has been passed to a third party for a consideration.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many Connexions cards have been issued. [79126]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* As of 5 November, there have been 175,161 Connexions Cards issued.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how old the youngest person is who has received a Connexions card. [79127]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* The youngest person who has received a Connexions Card is 14 years old.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what information can be held on an individual who uses a Connexions card. [79128]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* The young person's name, date of birth and photo is shown on the Card and their name, date of birth and unique Connexions Card number are recorded on the chip.

In addition to the above information, each young person's record on the Connexions Card database holds details of the learning centre(s), attendance, points collected and redeemed, and rewards chosen.

Recruitment (Over 50s)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what percentage of new recruits to his Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79299]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Some 3.5 per cent. of new recruits to the Department for Education and Skills since 9 June 2001, when the Department was established, were aged 50 and over.

Parliamentary Questions/Correspondence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to him from hon. Members in this session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79939]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: There are no Parliamentary Questions tabled to this department which are over a month old. Information on letters from hon. Members is not collected in this format and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The Cabinet Office, publishes a report to Parliament on an annual basis, setting out the volume of Members' correspondence received by departments. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 677W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many staff have been employed at his Department in each year from 1995–6 to 2002–3; and if he will make a statement. [80235]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The staffing numbers—as at 1 April in each year—are given below.

To note: Two numbers are given for the year 1995 as the Employment Department and Department for Education were then separate Departments. The numbers for 1996 to 2001 are for the Department for Education and Employment. Those for 2002 are for the Department for Education and Skills.

Year	*Staff numbers*
1995	4,890 (Employment) 1,630 (Education)
1996	5,050
1997—	4,480
1998—	4,500
1999—	4,560
2000—	4,970
2001—	5,430
2002—	4,820

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what public consultations have been commenced by his Department in each month since 10th July; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80266]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A list of the public consultations undertaken by my Department since 10 July, 2002 is attached. Information includes the start dates and closing dates as requested. The website address for all public consultations is www.dfes.gov.uk.consultations.

Departmental Funding (Huntingdon)

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will list the projects to which his Department has allocated funding in the Huntingdon Constituency since 1997, indicating the amount in each case. [79565]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department does not allocate funding at constituency level. The information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Details of overall allocations for all my departmental programmes are listed at table 4.2 in the Departmental Annual Report.

Online Centres

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many United Kingdom online centres *(a)* have been and *(b)* are intended to be established in Scotland. [80062]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UK online centres initiative is administered by the Department for Education and Skills and covers England only. The devolved administration in Scotland has an equivalent project details of which can be found on their website http://www.scotland.gov.uk/digitalscotland/

LEA Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his answer of 23 October, *Official Report*, column 383W, on LEA costs, what, in real terms, was *(a)* the total cash not devolved by each LEA to schools and *(b)* the total cash spent by the LEA on its staff and other overheads and administration, in each year from 1996–97 to 2002–03; what the annual real growth rate of such expenditure was in each LEA; and if he will make a statement. [80248]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member when I am able to reply and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Bramwood County Primary School

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, when he expects to be able to give Surrey County Council section 77 consent in respect of approval for sale of the former Bramwood County Primary School in Surrey. [80234]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has no record of a Bramwood County Primary School in Surrey. The Department has, however, received an application from Surrey County Council for the Secretary of State's consent to sell the site of the former Barnwood Primary School. The application will be considered by the School Playing Fields Advisory Panel as soon as Surrey County Council provides the additional information that has been requested.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will make a statement on the abolition of Criminal Records Bureau checks for school governors. [80038]

Mr. Miliband: In the light of the continuing problems being encountered by the Criminal Records Bureau, checks on school governors have been suspended for the foreseeable future. General advice was posted on the Department's School Governors' website on Monday 4 November. Further guidance for registered bodies will be issued shortly.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what amendment he intends to make to the School Governance (Constitution) Regulations to abolish the requirement for Criminal Records Bureau checks, [80037]

Mr. Miliband: The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2003 are currently out for consultation. The suggested wording in Schedule 6 on disqualifying governors from holding, or continuing to hold, office is triggered by an individual's refusal to agree to an application being made for a criminal records certificate when a request is made. While this wording does not in itself require all governors or potential governors to automatically undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check we will consider whether this disqualification should be removed or reworded before the Regulations are laid next spring.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many school governors have *(a)* received and *(b)* not received a Criminal Records Bureau check. [80036]

Mr. Miliband: Information on the number of newly appointed and re-appointed school governors who either have received or have not received a Criminal Records Bureau check is not routinely collected by the Department.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, when his Department will publish guidance to registered bodies about the postponement of Criminal Records Bureau checks as set out in the announcement made on 1 November. [80020]

Mr. Miliband: In the light of the continuing problems being encountered by the Criminal Records Bureau, checks on school governors have been suspended for the foreseeable future. General advice was posted on the Department's School Governors' website on Monday 4 November. Further guidance for registered bodies will be issued shortly.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many school days were lost owing to teachers being unable to gain clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau before the first day of this school year in *(a)* Cambridgeshire and *(b)* East of England. [79564]

Mr. Miliband: We do not hold this information.

School Staff (Legal Actions)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he will make a statement on the settlement reached in the case of Higginson *v.* Cheshire County Council; [79973]

(2) what guidance he has given to LEAs on informing governing bodies of the outcome of legal actions involving the authority and past or present members of a school's staff: and if he will make a statement. [79974]

Mr. Miliband: The conclusion reached in the case of Higginson versus Cheshire County Council is a matter for the parties concerned. My Department has not, to the best of my knowledge, issued advice to LEAs on disclosure of the outcomes of legal actions to governing bodies where such actions involve members of school staff.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what progress he has made in increasing the use of modern apprenticeships. [78459]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are currently 100,000 more young people on Advanced Modern Apprenticeships and Foundation Modern Apprenticeships than at the same time in 1998. The Government has published a target for 2004 for at least 28 per cent. of young people to start a Modern Apprenticeship by age 22. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has a lead role in meeting the target and has in place robust plans to do so. It is working closely with the Connexions Service, the new Sector Skills Councils and others to increase demand for places from both young people and employers. The LSC and Ministers are advised on MA developments by a Board made up of employers and others. New publicity campaigns are underway, including one aimed at employers which began last week.

IT Skills Shortages

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what recent representations he has received from *(a)* right hon. and hon. Members, *(b)* trade associations and employers organisations and *(c)* training companies, concerning higher level skills shortages in the information technology sector. [79834]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have not received any significant representations on higher level skills shortages in the Information Technology (IT) sector in the last six months. Skills deficits in the sector have declined from their peak in 1999 when the Stevens report, "Skills for the Information Age" highlighted these issues. Since that time, an £8 million programme of measures has been put in place to improve the image of the IT industry, build greater understanding of the labour market and strengthen links between education and industry.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will list the former grant-maintained schools which are parties to operating leases in respect of buildings. [79912]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not held centrally. Decisions in respect of operating leases were a matter for the governing bodies of former grant maintained schools.

Examinations (Irregularities)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many cases of irregularities with SATs results and tests were reported to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in each local education authority in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 to 10 October; and how many investigations were carried out by the QCA into these reports. [80049]

Mr. Miliband: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has made a concerted effort to raise awareness of the need to report every event, which could lead to an allegation of malpractice or maladministration in national tests. This has led to an increase in the number of events reported. All such reports are logged, but not all merit further investigation. Reports which do not normally require further investigation would include, for example, where a school has received its test pack with the external sealing damaged.

The total number of events reported to the QCA and investigated by the QCA in each of the last three years is as follows:

	2000	*2001*	*2002*
Events reported to QCA	147	270	479
Cases investigated by QCA	47	59	96

The breakdown of these totals by Local Education Authority is still being compiled. I shall write to my hon. Friend with this information when it becomes available and place a copy in the library.

School Boredom

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will make a statement on the causes of the boredom suffered by British secondary school pupils in the classroom. [79436]

Mr. Miliband: There are various factors which can lead to boredom in secondary school classrooms, including: lessons which are not challenging enough; lessons that do not cater for pupils with special educational needs; lessons that recover old ground; lack of progress on transition to secondary school; pupils' lack of awareness of their learning goals; and perceived lack of relevance of the curriculum to pupils' personal goals.

We believe good teaching and a good curriculum are the best ways to engage and motivate pupils. We have introduced a wide range of strategies to improve teaching and learning, including our widely-acclaimed Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Since September 2001 we have been implementing our new strategy to improve the attainment of 14 year olds (the Key Stage 3 Strategy). There have already been major improvements: OFSTED now rate nearly 70 per cent. of lessons as good compared with 40 per cent. five years ago.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will list the members of the board of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Council of the Learning and Skills Council, indicating *(a)* their place of residence and *(b)* those of them who represent or serve on local district, city or county councils. [79487]

Margaret Hodge: The board members of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Learning and Skills Council, are as follows;

Learning And Skills Council Herefordshire And Worcestershire Council Member names, sector representation and residence location

Mr. C Swan (Business) Chairman of LSC Herefordshire and Worcestershire Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire Work: Herefordshire	Mrs. C Bucknell (Further Education) Hereford Work: Warwickshire
Mr. A Curless Executive Director of LSC Herefordshire and Worcestershire Ross on Wye, Herefordshire Work: Herefordshire	Mr. N Pringle (Local Authority Chief Executive Officer) Bredwardine, Herefordshire Work: Herefordshire and Worcestershire.
Mr. N Bromley (FE College Principal) Bromsgrove, Worcestershire Work: Worcestershire	Mr. N Price OBE (Regional Development Agency Representative) Kidderminster, Worcestershire Work: Worcestershire
Cllr D Wicksteed (Councillor, Worcestershire County Council) Worcester Work: Worcestershire	Mr. John Worker (Business) Pershore, Worcestershire Work: Worcestershire
Mr. R Quallington (Voluntary) Little Witley, Worcestershire Work: Herefordshire And Worcestershire	Mr. Stuart Houghton (Business) Colwall, Malvern Worcestershire Work: Herefordshire
Mr. P Bannister (Trade Union) Bromsgrove, Worcestershire Work: Worcestershire	Mr. Mark Day (Business) Redditch, Worcestershire Work: Worcestershire
Mr. N Helme (Business) Leominster, Herefordshire Work: Herefordshire	Vacant post advertised for school Headteacher from either Herefordshire or Worcestershire.

Graduate Employment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many students graduated from university and how many graduates gained employment in the region in which they graduated, broken down by region in each year since 1995. [78556]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The available information is shown in the table.

Full-time UK domiciled first degree graduates from HE institutions in England

	Year of graduation:						
	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Graduates from HEIs in:							
North	10,080	10,216	10,550	10,702	10,859	11,052	10,864
Yorkshire and Humberside	20,319	21,523	22,218	21,689	22,722	23,458	23,320
East Midlands	14,910	16,282	15,353	16,818	16,849	16,569	16,241
East Anglia	4,453	4,739	4,744	4,560	4,635	4,744	4,716
South East	27,717	33,581	33,796	32,970	33,372	30,928	30,853
Greater London	29,630	28,633	27,573	27,080	27,231	29,500	28,919
South West	13,595	13,811	14,492	14,762	15,112	15,720	15,308
West Midlands	15,544	17,076	16,859	16,942	17,398	17,123	17,370
North West	21,948	22,594	23,261	22,772	23,259	24,191	24,180
Percentage gaining employment in their region of graduation[1]							
North	11.7	16.0	22.6	23.8	23.3	24.7	27.5
Yorkshire and Humberside	14.1	18.6	21.2	21.7	22.6	22.8	24.1
East Midlands	4.3	5.0	7.8	19.0	18.1	18.8	20.0
East Anglia	2.0	3.8	5.4	8.4	10.3	10.1	11.4
South East	11.7	12.5	18.0	25.6	24.3	24.8	25.9
Greater London	12.5	11.5	16.6	24.8	30.5	26.0	29.2
South West	10.3	12.4	14.8	21.4	21.0	21.9	22.1
West Midlands	10.7	10.5	16.3	18.8	19.9	21.0	21.4
North West	9.4	10.3	12.0	21.2	24.7	28.1	31.7

Source:
Higher Education Statistics Agency's First Destination Record.
[1] In the early years of the time series, not all graduates specified the region in which they obtained employment, and this has contributed to the lower employment rates in these years.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what his estimate is of the gross administrative costs of his Department in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms in each year from 1995–96 to 2002–03; what the growth rate was of each category of expenditure in each year; and if he will make a statement. [80236]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is set out in the table below; the figures for the Department include Sure Start and the Children's Fund. The information for 1995–96 is not available in the form requested.

(a) DfES Gross Administrative Costs—Cash (£000s)

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
DEL	248,103	220,825	206,650	213,987	212,834	217,326	219,170
AME	2,561	6,752	6,998	4,404	8,767	8,269	8,649
Total	250,664	227,577	213,648	218,391	221,601	225,595	227,819
Growth rate	n/a	−9%	−6%	2%	1%	2%	1%

(b) DfES Gross Administrative Costs—Real Terms @ 2002–03 Prices

DEL	288,051	248,707	226,520	229,017	222,846	222,759	219,170
AME	2,973	7,605	7,671	4,713	9,179	8,476	8,649
Total	291,024	256,311	234,191	233,731	232,025	231,235	227,819
Growth rate	n/a	−12%	−9%	0%	−1%	0%	−1%

Note:
DEL figures relate to the Departmental Expenditure Limit
AME figures relate to Annually Managed Expenditure

Education Finance (Cheshire)

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many representations he has received from residents of *(a)* Cheshire and *(b)* Macclesfield constituency registering their response to his Department's review of revenue grant distribution; when he expects to announce his decision following his Department's consultation; and if he will make a statement. [79274]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government on 6 November.

Student Bursaries

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many opportunity bursaries have been awarded to students from each Government Office region in the academic years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [80048]

Margaret Hodge: In 2001–02, 6,580 Opportunity Bursaries were allocated to students from Excellence Challenge areas entering higher education in England. In 2002–03, 8,210 new Opportunity Bursaries were allocated for those entering HE in England.

Information on the allocation and uptake of Opportunity Bursaries by government office regions is unavailable.

Child Care Facilities

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many *(a)* day nurseries, *(b)* childminders and *(c)* out of school clubs there were on 31 March and what percentage of these were provided by the private sector. [78593]

Mr. Miliband: We are unable to provide a breakdown on providers as requested, however information on the number of places is shown in the following table.

Number of, and places in, day care providers by type[1]
England
Position at 31 March 2001

	Number	*Places*
Day nurseries[2]	7,800	285,100
Registered childminders[2]	72,300	304,600
Out of school clubs[3]	4,900	152,800

Notes:
[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.
[2] Day nurseries and childminders provide care for children under eight years of age.
[3] Out of school clubs provide care for five to seven year old children.

Latest figures on Day Care facilities in England were published by the Department in the Statistical Bulletin "Children's Day Care facilities at 31 March 2001 (08/01)" in October 2001, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on the Department's web-site (www.dfes.gov.uk/ statistics).

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how much of the Sure Start Rural Fund was spent in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 to date, broken down by project. [78408]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* There is no separate fund identified from Sure Start's resources for rural areas. We have to date, however, approved 13 full Sure Start programmes where the catchment area covers predominantly rural areas.

The expenditure committed to each programme, by year is shown in the table.

Round	*Programme*	*Approved revenue grant (£000)*			*Capital*
		2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	
1	South Fenland	718	629	805	905
1	East Cleveland	469	597	645	791
2	East Bolsover	218	723	733	163
3	Berwick	—	319	621	839
3	Restormel China Clay	—	441	466	800
3	East Lindsey	—	325	589	750
3	West Allerdale	—	375	737	761
3	Kington and Leominster	—	350	629	800
3	North Devon	—	276	654	800
3	Oswestry	—	441	715	800
4	North East Derbyshire	—	140	480	750
4	Staffordshire Moorlands	—	180	450	750
4	West Somerset	—	109	500	750
	Total grant funding	*£1.405m*	*£4.905m*	*£8.024m*	*£9.659m*

The capital funding shown above was based on the capital strategy submitted by each programme, and is intended to fund major capital projects in the first three years of the programme. An additional £250,000 per programme may also be available to the programmes, if needed, to meet further capital expenditure in year 4 and 5 or earlier.

We have also established a pilot initiative of 50 smaller Sure Start programmes (48 programmes approved to date) in rural areas and pockets of deprivation, which would not normally be covered by the traditional Sure Start model. These programmes are managed through Early Years Childcare and Development Partnerships and linked to Neighbourhood Nurseries, Early Excellence Centres or other existing provision to deliver Sure Start-type services to some 150–170 children in each catchment area. Revenue funding up to £100,000 for each year and capital of up to £250,000 is available. The total budgeted provision for these programmes in 2002–03 is £10.25m. 48 of the 50 Mini Sure Start programmes have now been approved.

A list of the local authority districts where the 50 Mini Sure Start programmes are located is shown below.

Local Authority	*Number of small Sure Start programmes for rural areas and pockets of disadvantage*
Bedfordshire	1
Buckinghamshire	1
Cambridgeshire	1
Cornwall	3
Cheshire	1
Cumbria	3

Local Authority	*Number of small Sure Start programmes for rural areas and pockets of disadvantage*
Derbyshire	2
Devon	3
Dorset	1
Durham	2
East Sussex	1
Essex	1
Gloucestershire	1
Hampshire	1
Hertfordshire	1
Leicestershire	1
Lincolnshire	3
Norfolk	3
Northamptonshire	1
Northumbria	2
North Yorkshire	1
Nottinghamshire	1
Oxfordshire	1
Shropshire	1
Somerset	2
Staffordshire	1
Suffolk	2
Surrey	1
Warwickshire	1
West Sussex	1
Wiltshire	2
Worcestershire	1
East Riding of Yorkshire	1
Herefordshire	1
	50

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what strategies his Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79288]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I will write to my hon. Friend when the information is available and will place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Staff Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how much has been spent in recruiting staff to his Department in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south east in each year since 1997. [78557]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* I will write to my hon. Friend when the information is available and will place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Higher Education

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the annual real terms funding per student in higher education has been in each year since 1997; [78383]

(2) what projections he has made of the annual real terms funding per student in higher education in each year until 2010. [78384]

Margaret Hodge *[holding reply 31 October 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, when he will publish his annual grant letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for England. [80278]

Margaret Hodge: The grant letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for England will be published in due course.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will make a statement on the overall financial position of the higher education sector in each of the last three years; and how many institutions were in *(a)* surplus and *(b)* deficit in each of those years. [80317]

Margaret Hodge: The table shows the overall financial position of the publicly funded higher education sector in England and the number of institutions with deficits in the last three years for which information is available.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Total income £m	9,915	10,402	11,069
Operating surplus £m	173	125	44
Number of HEIs in deficit	28	52	48

In 2000–01, there were 130 higher education institutions funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what research he collates on the correlation between higher education expenditure and changes in Gross Domestic Product. [80337]

Margaret Hodge: Data for OECD countries shows a positive correlation between the proportion of GDP spent on higher education institutions and levels of Gross Domestic Product. It is difficult to isolate the impact of higher education on growth due to the many other things which determine economic growth. Evidence suggests that higher education is more important for growth in developed countries than other levels of education. The returns from higher education enjoyed by individuals are high. For example, graduates earn around 64 per cent. more than non-graduates. Participation in higher education generates wider social benefits such as improved health and reduced crime. Research also suggests that the spill-over effects of higher education R&D on productivity are extremely high.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will calculate the *(a)* amount spent per pupil on primary and secondary education by Cheshire County Council and *(b)* average amount spent per pupil on primary and secondary education by local authorities in England in the last financial year for which figures are available; what assessment he has made of the effect on educational provision in Cheshire if the average sum were to be spent; and if he will make a statement. [80005]

Mr. Miliband: The requested information is as follows:

(a) Net Current Expenditure per pupil in Cheshire	
Primary	£2310
Secondary	£2920
Both	£2580

(b) Net Current Expenditure per pupil in England	
Primary	£2440
Secondary	£3060
Both	£2710

All figures in cash terms and rounded to the nearest £10.

The data has been taken from Cheshire Education Authority's section 52 Outturn statement for the 2000–01 financial year. Variations in spending per pupil between authorities reflect higher area costs and greater incidence of deprivation in some areas. The Government will be announcing later this year the outcome of its review of formula funding for local authorities.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many representations he has received from residents of *(a)* Cheshire and *(b)* Congleton constituency registering their response to his Department's review of revenue grant distribution; when he expects to announce his decision following his Department's consultation; and if he will make a statement. [80004]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government on 6 November.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many students were attending a full-time degree level course or its equivalent in each year since 1990, broken down by local education authority. [79252]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* I will write to my right hon. friend when the information is available and will place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will consult *(a)* students and *(b)* parents of students living in Cambridgeshire on the findings of the review of higher education. [79571]

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what plans the Government has to consult student organizations on the outcome of the review of higher education. [79449]

Margaret Hodge: We have announced our intention to publish in January a strategy document setting out our vision for the development and reform of higher education, including the outcome of the review of student support. Once the document is published there will be opportunity for interested parties to respond.

Schools (Cambridgeshire)

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will ensure that no schools in Cambridgeshire have a cash budget cut in the next financial year. [79567]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 6 November 2002.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many representations his Department has received in connection with the funding of *(a)* schools and *(b)* school pupils in Cambridgeshire over the last year. [79570]

Mr. Miliband: My right hon. Friend has received 25 letters in connection with the funding of schools in Cambridgeshire over the last year. In addition a number of Cambridgeshire residents responded to the consultation on Local Government Funding reform which closed on 30th September: to identify precisely these letters from amongst the very large numbers of responses to the consultation would incur disproportionate cost.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many schools in Cambridgeshire had a cash budget cut in this financial year. [79568]

Mr. Miliband: In Cambridgeshire Local Education Authority 46 schools had a fall in their cash budget share in 2002–03, but of these only 7 also had a fall in their cash budget share per pupil. Changes in pupil numbers are the principal reason for changes in budget share from year to year. 199 schools had a rise in their cash budget share, but of these 12 had a fall in their cash budget share per pupil: this was largely in cases where small primary schools had rising rolls and therefore received less of the extra funding that goes to the smallest schools under the authority's formula.

The information is taken from data published in the LEA's section 52 budget statements for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Student Finance

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) when the Government will publish its review of student funding; [78522]

(2) To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if the Government will reintroduce targeted maintenance support for students from poorer backgrounds. [78521]

Margaret Hodge: The outcome of the student finance review will form part of the strategy document setting out our 10-year vision for the development and reform of higher education. The document will be published in the next few months; it would not be right to pre-empt it here by saying what is or is not planned.

School Funding

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what the average funding per pupil is in *(a)* Swindon and *(b)* England in 2002–03 [79960]

Mr. Miliband: In 2002–03 Swindon's average funding per pupil is £3,170 compared with the average in England of £3,610.

Note:

Figures in cash terms for pupils aged 4–19—rounded to the nearest £10. The figures include the Education SSA plus grants.

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how much his Department spent in 2001 on each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupil in (i) Staffordshire and (ii) Hertfordshire. [79849]

Mr. Miliband: The requested information for 2000–01 is as follows:

(a) Net current expenditure per pupil in maintained pre-primary and primary schools:

(i) Staffordshire £2,240

(ii) Hertfordshire £2,310.

(b) Net current expenditure per pupil in secondary schools:

(i) Staffordshire £2,780

(ii) Hertfordshire £2,950.

Source:
The LEA Section 52 Outturn statements relating to the 2000–01 financial year.
All figures in cash terms and rounded to the nearest £10.

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how much additional funding has been provided to secondary schools in (i) Staffordshire and (ii) Hertfordshire in the current financial year. [79850]

Mr. Miliband: Most additional funding for schools is allocated to local education authorities and cannot be disaggregated between different types of schools. The following table shows the additional funding that is specifically allocated for secondary education in Staffordshire and Hertfordshire in 2002–2003. Secondary schools will receive more than this from grants that cover all types of school, but the exact amount will depend on local decisions.

Grant	*Staffordshire* £	*Hertfordshire* £
School Standards Grant	4,929,600	5,975,100
Specialist Schools	1,624,659	2,023,168
Training Schools	–	155,000
Beacon Schools	92,000	190,500
Key Stage 3 Strategy	1,637,400	1,897,685
School Achievement Awards	317,560	578,020
Vocational GSCEs	58,732	73,203
Electronic Registration Systems	17,200	113,810
Total	8,677,151	11,006,486

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many representations on the funding of education in Staffordshire his Department has received since June 2001. [79848]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has answered 87 letters on the funding of education in Staffordshire since June 2001, and has received 5 petitions from schools. In addition a number of Staffordshire residents responded to the consultation on Local Government Funding reform which closed on 30 September: to identify precisely these letters from amongst the very large numbers of responses to the consultation would incur disproportionate cost.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how much was spent on each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupil in (i) 2001–2 and (ii) 2002–3 in (A) Cambridgeshire, (B) Bedfordshire, (C) Hertfordshire, (D) Northamptonshire, (E) Norfolk, (F) Essex, (G) London, (H) Liverpool and (I) Birmingham. [79569]

Mr Miliband: The following table contains information from 2000–01, the latest year for which data is available:

	LEA	*Net Current expenditure per pupil (primary)*	*Net Current expenditure per pupil (secondary)*
A	Cambridgeshire	2,290	2,930
B	Bedfordshire	2,320	2,730
C	Hertfordshire	2,240	2,950
D	Northamptonshire	2,330	2,940
E	Norfolk	2,360	3,150
F	Essex	2,390	3,090
G	Inner London	3,230	4,220
G	Outer London	2,590	3,230
G	Inner and Outer London	2,820	3,540
H	Liverpool	2,670	3,570
I	Birmingham	2,610	3,360
	England	2,440	3,060

Source:
Section 52 outturn statements relating to the 2000–01 financial year
All figures are in cash terms and rounded to the nearest 10.

Tuition Fees

Mr Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what percentage of students from families resident in each government office region were *(a)* exempt from tuition fees, *(b)* paying less than full tuition fees and *(c)* paying no fees at all in the academic year 2002–03 [80047]

Margaret Hodge: Data on contributions towards the cost of tuition by government office region for academic year 2002–03 are not available.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, if he will place in the Library the research analysis that led to his conclusion that a graduate had lifetime earnings £400,000 greater than non-graduates; from which period these data were gathered; whether the sum stated is gross or net of tax; and if he will estimate the sum *(a)* gross and *(b)* net of tax. [80065]

Margaret Hodge: The relevant data come from the four quarters Autumn 2000 to Summer 2001 in the Labour Force Survey. The £400,000 figure is gross, and is consistent with conventional practice used by ONS when quoting earnings figures. The equivalent figure, net of income tax, national insurance and other contributions, is around £250,000. For the avoidance of doubt, £400,000 is the earnings premium of a graduate over that of the national average rather than for a non-graduate. The premium over a non-graduate would be significantly higher.

Student Loans

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what the *(a)* stock and *(b)* net annual investment is of student loans; and what the additional cost would be at full market rate of interest. [79851]

Margaret Hodge: At the end of the 2000–01 financial year there were some 2,253,000 borrowers with student loans, either mortgage style or income contingent. This

includes 705,000 borrowers with loans which have been sold to the private sector. The total amount outstanding on student outlay was £7,833.2m of which £1,789.9m was in respect of loans sold to the private sector.

The resource cost for student loans issued in the 2000–01 financial year was estimated to be £794m.

Student loans are charged interest at the rate of inflation. A full market rate of interest would be higher and would not increase the costs to public funds. It would, however, increase the total amount repaid by HE leavers and graduates. It would also increase the time taken to repay their loans and the likelihood of loans being written off.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive regarding his Department's review of post-16 student support; [78782]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the interest rate on student loans. [78779]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has had no such discussions so far.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Paul Burrell

Ian Lucas: To ask the Solicitor-General what discussions her Department had in the case of Regina *v.* Paul Burrell with the Crown Prosecution Service concerning the making of an application for a public interest immunity certificate. [79838]

The Solicitor-General: No such discussions took place. There was never any question of continuing with the prosecution while withholding disclosure of the information and no attempt was made to do so. No Minister was asked to give a PII certificate or signed one, nor was a draft certificate ever prepared, nor was any consideration given by anyone to preparing such a certificate to place before the judge. The judge agreed to postpone the disclosure of the information in the public interest until further enquiries had been carried out and a fuller picture obtained so as to enable properly informed decisions to be made, in particular as to the future conduct of the trial.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Solicitor-General, if she will investigate the circumstances surrounding the decision of the CPS to prosecute Paul Burrell; and what the cost of the action was to public funds. [79845]

The Solicitor-General: On the information known to the Crown Prosecution Service at the time of the decision last year to bring a prosecution, I have no reason to doubt the assessment made that there was a realistic prospect of securing a conviction and that the public interest was in favour of a prosecution. The cost of the prosecution to public funds has not yet been ascertained.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Solicitor-General, if she will undertake an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the collapse of the court case Regina *v.* Paul Burrell. [79847]

The Solicitor-General: A full statement was made by the prosecution and the facts of the case are already known. A copy of the statement has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Crown Prosecution Service will be considering carefully the lessons of what happened but, as the Prime Minister has stated, there is no need for an inquiry. This was a unique set of circumstances.

Llew Smith: To ask the Solicitor General, what plans she has to review the procedure for issuing public interest immunity certificates. [80095]

The Solicitor-General: None.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Solicitor-General, which Ministers signed PII certificates in the case of Regina *v.* Burrell; and which categories of information these certificates covered. [79843]

The Solicitor-General: No Minister was asked to give a PII certificate or signed one, nor was a draft certificate ever prepared, nor was any consideration given by anyone to preparing such a certificate to place before the judge.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Solicitor-General, if she will make a statement on the discussions between the Attorney-General and the Director of Public Prosecutions about the prosecution of Paul Burrell prior to the decision to end the case; and when he first discussed the decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions to end the case against Paul Burrell. [80059]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General first learnt about the case shortly after his appointment. The Director of Public Prosecutions had drawn the case to the attention of his predecessor in May last year. Thereafter, the case was included in a list of high profile cases in respect of which brief reports are provided to Law Officers on a monthly basis. The Law Officers were not asked for and did not give their views about whether the case should proceed. On Tuesday last week, the Crown Prosecution Service and prosecution counsel drew the attention of the Attorney-General to the new information that had been disclosed by the Palace to the police. Naturally, the Attorney-General's views were sought on how to proceed in the light of that development and he gave them. But in the end, as he made plain should be the case, the decision was made by the CPS following further consideration and having taken leading counsel's advice. At the time that decisions were made, the Director of Public Prosecutions was abroad. He kept in close touch with his office and approved the decision, but there were no direct discussions between the Attorney-General and the Director of Public Prosecutions. They first spoke directly of the matter on 3 November.

Robert Hamill

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Solicitor General, when the Department of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland received papers on the investigation into the death of Robert Hamill and when he expects a decision on prosecution to be made. [77619]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 30 October 2002]:* A police investigation file relating to the death of Robert Hamill was received in the Director's Office on 7 August 1997. Following consideration of that file a direction was issued on 27 January 1998 to prosecute one person, Paul Hobson, for the scheduled offence of murder and affray. On 25 February 1999 at Belfast Crown Court Hobson was found not guilty of murder but guilty of affray and sentenced to 4 years imprisonment.

On 12 June 2001 a second police investigation file dealing with matters arising out of the investigation into the death of Robert Hamill was received in the Director's Office. Following consideration of the second file, on 20 August 2001 a direction was issued to prosecute two persons, Michael McKee and Andrea McKee, for the offence of doing an act with intent to pervert the course of justice. On 7 May 2002 at Craigavon Crown Court the two persons pleaded guilty to the offence. Michael McKee was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment and Andrea McKee was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment suspended for 2 years.

On 19 December 2001 a third police investigation file dealing further with matters arising from the investigation into the death of Robert Hamill was received in the Director's Office. Following consideration of the third file together with further material which became available in May 2002, a decision as to prosecution of persons reported in that file will issue shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Pesticides

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the pesticides and pest repellent chemicals that have been withdrawn from use in commercial products following EU directives in the last five years; and what the reason was for their withdrawal in each case. [79378]

Mr. Morley: Directive 91/414/EEC concerns the marketing of plant protection products (these are basically pesticides and pest repellent chemicals used in agriculture). From 1998 to 2002 the following chemicals were withdrawn from the market under the first stage of the 91/414/EEC review programme: chlozolinate; dinoterb; DNOC, fentin acetate; fentin hydroxide; fenvalerate; lindane; monolinuron; pyrazophos and quintozene. Decisions to withdraw a further 8 chemicals have been taken but in all these cases the marketing can continue into 2003–2004.

Chlozolinate, fenvalerate, monolinuron and pyrazophos were withdrawn because the companies concerned did not provide, sufficient information to support their review. The other chemicals were withdrawn because they did not meet the requirements laid down in Directive 91/414/EEC. In all these cases concerns were expressed regarding the safety of operators potentially exposed to the chemicals and for some there were also concerns regarding the behaviour of the chemicals in the environment and their possible impact on non-target organisms.

Finally, marketing authorisations for 320 chemicals throughout the EU (of which 45 had UK approvals) will be withdrawn in July 2003 (although a few "essential uses" of some of these chemicals can continue to 2007). In all these cases withdrawal arises because the companies concerned have not supported the chemicals in the second and third stages of the review programme.

Aggregate Imports

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much aggregate has been imported in each of the last five years. [79758]

Mr. Wilson: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Offshore Transmission Grid

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she plans to publish her response to the PB Power Report Concept Study-Western Offshore Transmission Grid published in February. [79529]

Mr. Wilson: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Solar Power

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated cost is of delivering a 100,000 solar PV roof programme funded by 50 per cent. capital grants by 2010; and if she will make a statement. [79949]

Mr. Wilson: The Government Industry Photovoltaic Group Report of March 2001 recommended "The most effective means of encouraging the deployment of PV in the UK would be a major Market Stimulation Programme featuring a 50 per cent. capital grant for 70,000 domestic roofs and a similar grant scheme for larger non—domestic buildings costing around £150 million over 10 years." Taken together this is equivalent to a 100,000 PV roofs programme.

Nuclear Liabilities

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the public consultation held on the proposals for a nuclear liabilities management authority; how many responses were made to the consultation; and if she will place copies of consultation submissions in the Library. [80098]

Mr. Wilson: I will write to my hon. friend and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Energy White Paper

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will make a statement on the purpose, agenda and attendance of each workshop held with stakeholders on the energy White Paper; and if she will make a statement on the outcomes of each. [80346]

Mr. Wilson: We organised expert workshops with stakeholders to stimulate debate on energy issues with a view to informing the preparation of the Energy White Paper. The workshops covered a wide range of issues and included three opening workshops in London,

Glasgow and Newport, a final integrative conference in London and workshops on regional issues, energy policy and long term carbon reductions, energy efficiency renewables and the energy implications of PIU energy review. Workshops and focus groups were also held with the general public. These workshops contributed to the 6,500 contributions received to the consultation. Details are being posted on the DTI's web site at http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/developep/reports.shtml.

Magnox Fuel

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the *(a)* technical feasibility and *(b)* cost of converting the dry store for spent magnox fuel at Wylfa into a hardened sub-surface storage vault. [80347]

Mr. Wilson: None. Any such assessment would be a mater for BNFL Magnox Generation and would be subject to regulatory scrutiny.

Renewable Energy

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much capital grant funding is available from 2002 to 2006 for the *(a)* offshore wind, *(b)* biomass and *(c)* solar PV industries as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review; and if she will make a statement. [80213]

Mr. Wilson: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress made in implementing regional assessments and targets for renewable energy provisions; and what effect they have on the planning and promotion at regional and local level of on-shore wind farms. [80010]

Mr. Wilson: The Government initiated regional assessments throughout all regions in the UK. These studies identified each region's renewable energy resource. This information is now available on the DTI Website at: http://www.dti.gov.uk/renewable/oxera report.pdf.

This report also sets out each region's possible contribution to our national 10 per cent. target.

We would encourage Local Planning Authorities to earmark sites in their local development plans for renewable energy developments.

Development plans provide the basis for decisions on specific development proposals. These ensure that planning decisions are not arbitrary and that developers have a measure of certainty about what development is allowed.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how many applications to develop *(a)* onshore and *(b)* offshore wind farms her Department has received in each year since 1997; and how many of these have been approved. [80009]

Mr. Wilson: The following is the information requested:

Onshore Windfarms

	Applications	*Approvals*
1997–99	0	0
2000	1	0
2001	0	0
2002 (to date)	0	1

Offshore Windfarms

	Applications	*Approvals*
1997–2000	0	0
2000	1	0
2001	0	0
2002 (to date)	7	2

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) of 17 October 2002, *Official Report*, c. 891W, what criteria are being used in the development of the United Kingdom wind speed database. [80063]

Mr. Wilson: The UK windspeed database has now been made available on the DTI website at: http://www.dti.gov.uk/renewable/windspeed/online.html.

The data is the result of an air flow model that estimates the effect of topography on wind speed. Each value stored in the database is the estimated average windspeed for a 1 km square at 10m, 25m and 45m above ground level. The database does not take account of local thermally driven winds, topography on a small scale or local surface roughness. The data is intended as a guide to be followed by on-site measurements.

The database uses the Ordnance Survey grid system for Great Britain and the grid system of the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what percentage of the United Kingdom's energy is generated from wind energy; and what percentage it will have to be if the Renewables Obligation is to be met in 2010. [80011]

Mr. Wilson: In 2001 0.03 per cent. of the total primary inland consumption of energy in the United Kingdom was accounted for by onshore and offshore wind, with all renewable sources together accounting for 1.3 per cent. Electricity generated from wind accounted for 0.3 per cent. of electricity sold in the UK in 2001 with all renewable sources eligible for the renewables obligation together accounting for 1.5 per cent.

The Government have a target for 10 per cent. of licensed electricity supplies in the UK to be generated from sources eligible for the Renewables Obligation by 2010, but this Obligation is a market based approach and the deployment levels for individual renewables technologies are for the industry rather than the Government. We would, however, expect a significant contribution to the 10 per cent. target to be from onshore and offshore wind energy.

Mobile Phone Masts

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research is under-way into the health and safety issues surrounding the siting of mobile telecommunications masts. [79883]

Mr. Timms: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Regulatory Costs

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the cost to business of the draft regulations to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of *(a)* sexual orientation and *(b)* religion. [79073]

Alan Johnson: Unfortunately I have not been able to glean the information necessary to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Trade Liberalisation

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what role her Department played in the development on the non-paper on trade liberalisation at the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg; and what outcomes emerged from discussions relating to this paper involving her Department. [77568]

Ms Hewitt: At the end of the World Summit on sustainable Development (WSSD) Bali Prepcom in June, the Chair asked Member States for ideas on how to resolve those areas (which included parts other trade text amongst others) of the Plan of Implementation which had yet to be agreed. The European Commission (acting in accordance with its general mandate from EU member states to negotiate trade issues) and the US agreed a non-paper on the trade, finance and globalisation texts which was submitted to the South Africans as an informal contribution in advance of WSSD in Johannesburg. This was not a formal EU position agreed by member states. The formal EU position was adopted in the Development Council conclusions on WSSD agreed in May prior to the WSSD Bali Prepcom.

All discussions on trade liberalisation issues at Johannesburg itself were based on text negotiated at the Bali Prepcom and developed through subsequent drafts produced by the Chair of the Trade Group (the Antiguan Ambassador to the UN) during WSSD itself. I welcome the fact that the final trade sections of the WSSD text strongly reinforce the commitments made at the WTO Ministerial in Doha in November 2001. The text as agreed by consensus is publicly available on the WSSD website (www.johannesburgsummit.org/).

Shipbuilding

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial assistance was provided by the Government to the *(a)* Shipbuilding Intervention Fund and *(b)* Home Shipbuilding Credit Guarantee Scheme in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–00, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001–02; what amounts are outstanding under the HSCGS; what amounts have been written off under the HSCGS; what assessment has taken place of *(A)* the SIF and *(B)* the HSCGS; and if she will make a statement. [78269]

Alan Johnson: Unfortunately I have not been able to glean the information necessary to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Broadband

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 250W, how the £30 million Broadband Fund is being divided amongst the regions and devolved administrations. [80064]

Mr. Timms: The £30 million UK Broadband Fund has been divided amongst the regions and devolved administrations as follows:

Region/Nation	*Total Amount Awarded From Broadband Fund (£million)*
Scotland	4.39
Wales	2.67
Northern Ireland	1.46
North East	1.46
North West	2.68
Yorkshire and Humberside	3.10
West Midlands	2.08
East Midlands	2.09
East of England	3.22
South West	3.78
South East	2.90
London	0.11

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what assessment she has made of the cost arising from broadband interference caused by powerline telecommunications to high frequency radio transmissions by broadcasters and short range devices used by the police and Government agencies. [78531]

Mr. Timms: The Radiocommunications Agency intends to publish a national consultation later this month to determine the implications, including costs, associated with a number of possible options for limiting emissions from powerline and other wired telecommunication systems that have potential to cause interference to high frequency radio services.

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what steps she is taking to minimise broadband interference caused by powerline telecommunications to high frequency radio transmissions by broadcasters and short range devices used by the police and Government agencies. [78530]

Mr. Timms: The Radiocommunications Agency established a Technical Working Group in March 2001 to determine the compatibility of powerline telecommunication and other broadband wireline systems with radio services operating between 1.6 MHz and 30 MHz. Membership of the group was open to all interested parties and its final report will be published later this month as part of a national consultation. The outcome of the consultation is expected in early 2003. It will be used to inform the Government's contribution to work that is underway in the relevant international standards bodies concerned with limiting broadband telecommunication interference.

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will make a statement on the Government's policy toward internet access via powerline telecommunications. [78529]

Mr. Timms: The Government has set a target of making the UK the most competitive and extensive broadband market of all the G7 countries. We believe this can best be achieved through deployment of a wide range of competing delivery technologies and this includes powerline telecommunications. This technology has the potential to provide broadband connectivity to isolated communities and is currently undergoing some small project trails in Scotland that are part funded by government.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many applications were considered and by whom for the position of DTI South West Regional Broadband Advisor; and if she will make a statement on the training and experience held by the incumbent; [78922]

(2) what the nature is of the relationship between Smart South West and the UK Online for Business Regional Broadband Champion; [78924]

(3) when, by whom and at what cost the appointment of the UK Online for Business Regional Broadband Champion was advertised; [78921]

(4) if she will make a statement on the experience and technical training of the successful candidate selected to be the South West Regional Broadband Unit Broadband Expert; [78923]

(5) if she will make a statement on the competition for the appointment by Smart South West of a UK Online for Business Regional Broadband Champion; and what the remuneration offered was. [78925]

Mr. Timms *[holding answers 5 November 2002]:* The Department of Trade and Industry is currently setting up a UK Broadband Taskforce, with the aim of extending the availability and take-up of broadband throughout the United Kingdom.

A regional broadband co-ordinator is being appointed in each English region and Devolved Administration. This person will work alongside Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Devolved Administrations in order to achieve the unit's overarching aim.

Competition for each of the contracts has been undertaken on an open and transparent basis. Contracts were advertised through the Broadband Stakeholder Group, the Communication Managers' Association and a recruitment agency. In a number of cases RDAs also put forward candidates. The advertising process was run at no cost; the recruitment agency charges a fee if one of their candidates is placed—in line with industry standards. From the candidates put forward a shortlist was compiled in discussion between DTI and the relevant RDA, based on the match between the candidate's CV and the job description. The shortlisted candidates were generally interviewed by a representative of the DTI, the new Head of the UK Broadband Taskforce and a representative of the Regional Development Agency.

In the case of the South West Regional Development Agency, the long-list consisted of seven candidates of which three were interviewed. The successful candidate was considered by each interviewer, independently, to have the required combination of communication skills, knowledge of broadband and regional understanding to perform the role of regional broadband co-ordinator. The remuneration package for the successful candidate is approximately in line with the total remuneration package offered to a Range 10 Civil Servant in the DTI (up to £46,502 plus superannuation, outside London).

Smart South West is a Public Private Partnership whose purpose is to map IT-related projects in the South West Region. The new regional broadband co-ordinator in the South West Region is a former part-time employee of Smart South West. The broadband co-ordinator will work across the region, including with bodies such as Smart South West in order to extend the availability and take-up of broadband.

As part of the appointment and contract management process, we are putting appropriate measures in place in order to ensure that we avoid or minimise potential conflicts of interest.

Nuclear Power Stations

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps will be taken in respect of the decommissioning dismantling and clearance of Nuclear Magnox Reactors in Great Britain. [77598]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL has announced its strategy for the Magnox stations including projected latest dates for their generating lifetimes. As is stated in CM2919 "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy—Final Conclusions" published in 1995, the decommissioning strategies of nuclear operators are subject to quinquennial review by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Such a review of the decommissioning strategy for the reactors operated by Magnox Electric plc was completed by HSE in February 2002. Details of the strategy, and the outcome of the review, can be found in HSE's report which is available on the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/nsd/magdecom.pdf.

As indicated in the recent white paper "Managing the Nuclear Legacy—A Strategy for Action", the detailed timing and operational plans for decommissioning the Magnox stations is one of the matters to be considered by the Liabilities Management Authority (LMA) once established. The LMA will operate openly and transparently and its plans will be published.

Parliamentary Questions/Correspondence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to her from hon. Members in this Session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79945]

Ms Hewitt: The Cabinet Office publishes a report to Parliament on an annual basis setting out the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May, *Official Report* column 677W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

The following table shows the number of letters to hon. Members which remain outstanding.

1 Month Old	*2 Months*	*3 Months*	*4 Months*	*Over 6 Months*
71	47	22	8	—

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer from the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, of 19 September 2002, *Official Report*, c.238W, when she will reply to the letter dated 31 January from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding the Johannesburg Earth Summit. [79338]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* I apologise for the delay in responding to the hon. Member's letter. A reply has been sent out today.

Consumer Sector

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what percentage of *(a)* United Kingdom GDP and *(b)* the United Kingdom work force the consumer goods and business and consumer services sector accounts for; and if she will make a statement. [78109]

Ms Hewitt: Industries covered by the DTI consumer goods and services unit represented about 14 per cent. of UK total Gross Value Added at basic prices in 2000. The estimate has been derived from the ONS Input-Output Analyses and the ONS Annual Business Inquiry.

Estimate of the UK work force involved in the sector are not available in sufficient detail to provide an estimate, but the ONS Annual Business Inquiry shows it provides 18 per cent. of GB employee jobs.

Subscriptions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how much was spent on the UK's subscription to the *(a)* WTO, *(b)* Energy Charter Treaty Secretariat, *(c)* International Energy Agency, *(d)* International Atomic Energy Agency, *(e)* Safeguards Support Programmes and *(f)* Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–00 and (iv) 2000–01; what the budget is for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [78291]

Ms Hewitt: Please see table below.

[all figures in £000s]

Organisation	*Actual 97–98*	*Actual 98–99*	*Actual 99–00*	*Actual 00–01*	*Budget 01–02*
WTO	2,794	3,075	3,016	3,348	3,288
Energy Charter Treaty Secretariat (European Energy Charter)	318	217	238	253	260
International Energy Agency	859	494	783	739	861
International Atomic Energy Agency	9,346	3,046	5,999	12,539	10,165
Safeguards Support Programmes[1]	1,391	1,369	1,548	1,208	1,450
Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons	5,091	1,547	906	1,539	3,561

Note:
[1] These are voluntary contributions, not subscriptions.

BAE Systems

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 17 June 2002 *Official Report*, column 28W, on BAE Systems, if she will list the meetings she and her ministers have had with BAE Systems since June 2001, stating in each case the date and subject of the meeting. [79878]

Alan Johnson: Since June 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and her Ministers have had meetings with BAE Systems on the following dates:

3 July 2001	16 July 2002
13 September 2001	25 July 2002
20 November 2001	5 September 2002
23 May 2002	24 September 2002
12 June 2002	23 October 2002
1 July 2002	31 October 2002

A range of subjects was discussed at these meetings.

Fireworks

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate the number of domestic animals which received veterinary treatment as a result of an accident involving a firework during October, November and December 2001; and what plans she has to launch an investigation into how the health of domestic animals is affected by fireworks. [76529]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have no records of accidents to domestic animals involving fireworks. My colleagues at DEFRA are considering amendments to the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and they will look into whether there is scope to take more effective action where the welfare of captive or domestic animals is being endangered through the reckless discharge of fireworks.

Miners Compensation

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many mining compensation claims resolutions she estimates are being held up by delays in releasing to solicitors the chronic bronchitis and emphysema pensions model on computer disk; [80321]

(2) what proportion of relevant outstanding mining compensation claims she expects to be speeded by release of the first phase of the chronic bronchitis and emphysema pensions model on computer disk; and what proportion will have to await subsequent phases of the model for speedy resolution. [80320]

Mr Wilson: I will write to my hon. Friend.

British Energy

Mr Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria British Energy will have to meet in order for them to gain an extension to their loan agreement with the Government. [78987]

Mr Wilson: No decisions have been taken and no commitments given on British Energy's long term future at this time.

Mr Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what terms the Government loan was agreed with British Energy; and whether these terms are under review. [78988]

Mr Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, c.665W, to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) about the credit facility agreement provided to British Energy.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what interest rate was attached to the recent loan made to British Energy; and what contingencies have been put in place in the event that British Energy is unable to repay the loans. [80345]

Mr. Wilson: Full details of the credit facility agreement are commercially confidential unless and until it is made public by British Energy. The Government has taken security over British Energy's assets for the facility provided to the company.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what communications she has had with the European Commissioner Monti in respect of the loan provided to British Energy. [80383]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met Commissioner Monti on 10 October to discuss various matters including rescue aid to British Energy.

Women in Science

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what plans she has to publish the Greenfield Report. [74918]

Ms Hewitt: I am looking forward to receiving the final version of Baroness Greenfield's report on a stronger strategic approach to promoting women in science, engineering and technology by the end of this month and will publish it as soon as possible thereafter. We will also publish the Government's response once we have had a chance to consider the report's recommendations properly.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when she will publish the Greenfield Report on women in science; [74964]

(2) when she will publish her responses to the recommendations in the Greenfield Report. [74965]

Ms Hewitt: I am looking forward to receiving the final version of Baroness Greenfield's report on a stronger strategic approach to promoting women in science, engineering and technology by the end of this month and will publish it as soon as possible thereafter. We will also publish the Government's response once we have had a chance to consider the report's recommendations properly.

Women's Enterprise

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what she is doing to increase the number of women setting up their own business; and if she will make a statement. [76228]

Ms Hewitt: DTI is addressing the issue of women's enterprise principally through the Small Business Service and its network of Business Link Operators.

SBS has been leading on cross-government work on developing Women in Business policy. It has built up good relations with a number of organisations looking into this area—including the recently formed Prowess which brings together representatives of business support organisations targeting help at female entrepreneurs. Prowess has been supported by my Department's Phoenix fund. The Phoenix Development Fund is funding 96 projects to support innovative approaches to promoting enterprise in disadvantaged areas and under-represented groups, including women. All of the projects are open to women, but 20 focus specifically on their needs.

I attended the formal launch of Prowess on 30 October which highlighted their role in raising awareness of the needs of women entrepreneurs and the need to work towards equal numbers of women and men starting in business.

Post Office

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who holds the contracts to provide the IT system to run the post office card system for ACT. [79152]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day-to-day responsibility of Post Office Limited and I have therefore asked the Chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* planned completion date, *(c)* current expected completion date, *(d)* planned cost and *(e)* current estimated cost are of the IT system to support the Post Office Card Account. [79956]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether Horizon swipecard software will be used to support the Post Office Card account. [79923]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Engineering Industry

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what measures she is taking to promote British engineering; [79545]

(2) what measures she is taking with the Department of Education and Skills to increase the number of graduates in the engineering sector. [79466]

Mr. Wilson: I am taking a number of measures to promote British engineering. British engineering is able to benefit from the services of British Trade International in competing in overseas markets. And there is a range of specialist activity such as the "Capability Statement" documents on education and training in the oil and gas industry which describe the roles UK trained and educated engineers play in all the major centres of oil and gas production world-wide.

The Department promotes engineering in key overseas markets through the deployment of International Technology Promoters who promote collaboration between UK firms and overseas counterparts. Smaller engineering firms have access to additional support through a secondments programme, which enables SMEs to improve their competitive position by spending up to a year in a foreign company.

I am taking a range of measures: to encourage young people to consider engineering as a rewarding career choice; to increase the attractiveness of degree courses in engineering; and to provide a clear progression path though school, FE and HE. I am particularly keen to ensure individual learners and employers are offered flexible training opportunities for people in the workforce.

The Government accept that without an adequate supply of young people studying the sciences, technologies, engineering and mathematics, the UK's long-term prospects are bleak. The Government aims to increase young people's engagement in science and technology through increased activity in schools that will inspire young people and improve perceptions of the relevance of the curriculum to the world of work. For its part the DTI is working closely with our colleagues in the DfES to ensure that in response to Sir Gareth Roberts' Report "SET for Success" a number of measures are taken to improve the supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills. For example: an additional investment of £100 million a year by 2005–06 (in addition to extra resources for the Department for Education and Skills) to implement the recommendations of the Review

Government will also be funding the Research Councils to increase the minimum PhD stipend to £12,000 by 2005–06, which should also enable the average PhD stipend to rise to over £13,000 by 2005–06 and investing in research careers by increasing funds for PhD training.

Sir Gareth's Report recommends that the Government increase its support for SETNET, (the Science, Engineering, Technology and Maths Network) and the UK-wide network of 53 SETPoints that it administers which channel Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) activities supported by industry into schools. This network also administers the Science and Engineering Ambassadors programme. The Government is still considering how best to respond to these specific recommendations.

The Government are also committed to supporting the new Engineering and Technology Board, which has replaced the former Engineering Council and has the more effective promotion of science, technology, engineering and maths as one of its key objectives.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of engineers educated in the UK who were working abroad in each of the last five years. [79574]

Mr. Wilson: This information is not available.

Recruitment (Over-50s)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of new recruits to her Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79310]

Ms Hewitt: 7.8 per cent. of new recruits to my Department in the past two years were 50 and over.

Lighter Refills

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what action she will take in accordance with European legislation to allow cigarette lighter refills to be limited to a 5ml can size. [79585]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Environmental and Social Responsibility

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many of the FTSE 350 companies have reported on the environmental and social implications of their activities since January; and what assessment she has made of the quality of these reports; [79054]

(2) what assessment she has made of the merits of companies' reportings of environmental and social impacts of their activities. [79056]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In July 2002, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs contacted all companies in the FTSE 350 to assess the number companies reporting on their environmental performance.

99 companies currently report on their environmental performance, including data on their key impacts. Of those 99 companies, 20 have produced their first report since December 2001. 140 companies make information on their environmental performance publicly available, but fall short of full reporting.

The General Guidelines on Environmental Reporting published in November 2001, suggests contents and key indicators for the quality of individual company environmental reports.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how the Government will ensure that its corporate policies on social and environmental responsibility of companies help meet its sustainable development targets. [79053]

Mr. Timms: The Government's approach on both Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development is subject to extensive inter-departmental co-ordination and co-operation. The teams in DTI supporting these processes are both located in the Department's Sustainable Development Unit with a unified management structure, ensuring a closely integrated approach on the Government's sustainable development and CSR objectives.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of the Prime Minister on 16 October 2002, *Official Report*, c. 310, what discussions her Department has held regarding social responsibility with *(a)* business and *(b)* groups representing civil society, the environment, labour standards and human rights and *(c)* other organisations. [79170]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has consulted widely on Corporate Social Responsibility with a range of different stakeholders. A series of Ministerial Round Tables were held last year, and two further Round Tables took place in September with, respectively, business and groups representing civil society. In addition, Ministers and officials regularly meet representatives of the different interest groups bilaterally, as well as participating in meetings and events organised by them.

Miners Pensions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average pension paid to members of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme is in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* England; and what the average pension paid to widows and widowers is in the same scheme. [78969]

Mr. Wilson: These are matters for the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme. I am informed, however, that the average pensions paid for the year to 30 September 2002 were:

Average pension paid

	£
Wales	8,948.60
Scotland	8,598.53
England	10,331.54

Average pension paid to widows or widowers

	£
Wales	5,198.71
Scotland	5,237.99
England	5,586.34

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average pension paid to members of the miners pension fund is in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* England; and what the average pension paid to widows or widowers is in the same scheme. [78960]

Mr. Wilson: These are matters for the Mineworkers Pension Scheme. I am informed, however, that the average pensions paid in the year to 30 September 2002 were:

Average pension paid

	£
Wales	2,010.50
Scotland	1,997.56
England	2,564.19

Average pension paid to widows or widowers

	£
Wales	1,456.67
Scotland	1,508.07
England	1,629.51

Insolvency Service

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress she has made on introducing new pay scales for the Insolvency Service; and what recent discussions she has had with the Treasury about their introduction. [79063]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The outline of the new Pay and Grading system for The Insolvency Service was contained in a pay remit which has been formally submitted to the Treasury and discussions are continuing.

World Trade Organisation

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the brief was of the British civil servant who accompanied the Ghanaian delegation to the Doha talks. [78840]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* No British civil servant accompanied the Ghanaian delegation to the Doha talks. At the specific request of the Government of Ghana, a consultant working in the Ghanaian Ministry of Trade and Industry on a two-year long DFID funded Trade Policy Project accompanied the Ghanaian delegation. The consultant's role, as set out in an official statement by the Ghana Ministry of Trade & Industry in December 2001, was to observe the WTO process and analyse the issues for the Ghanaian Government. The consultant did not participate in any of the negotiations.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the staff of the World Trade Organisation are selected; and what the process was by which the deputy director generals were recently appointed; and if she will make a statement. [79193]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* WTO staff at all grades below Deputy Director General are selected on merit after open advertisement. Interviews are conducted by WTO management on the basis of staff rules agreed by WTO members.

The appointment of the four Deputy Director Generals is a matter for the Director General who makes his decision in consultation with WTO members.

The Director General is chosen by all WTO members, after a call for candidates, on the basis of consensus.

Renewables Obligation

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce banding of renewable obligation certificates under the Renewables Obligation; and if he will make a statement. [79950]

Mr. Wilson: There are no plans to introduce banding of the Renewables Obligation. The Renewables Obligation is a market led measure and will remain so. The Obligation is helping the UK renewable industry to take forward those renewable technologies that are close to becoming commercially competitive. Government grants continue to support the development of technologies still some way from commercial viability.

Public Service Agreements

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which of her Department's Public Service Agreements relate to fuel poverty reduction; and what progress has been made to date in achieving them. [79500]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has recently agreed a PSA target for 2003–2006 to ensure the UK ranks in the top 3 most competitive energy markets in the EU and G7 in each year, whilst on course to maintain energy security and to achieve fuel poverty objectives. We also have a joint target with DEFRA to improve the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources, including through the use of energy saving technologies, to help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. from 1990 levels and move towards a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010.

Fuel poverty objectives will be measured using the relevant fuel poverty targets for England, as defined and set out in "The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy",

The number of households in fuel poverty has been reducing since 1996 as has the number of vulnerable fuel poor. In broad terms it is estimated that the number of fuel poor households in England has fallen from about 4.3 million in 1996 to about 2.8 million in 2000 (when housing costs and ISMI are included as income), with the number of vulnerable fuel poor estimated to have fallen from about 3.0 million to about 2.3 million in the same time.

The 2001 English House Condition Survey will update the information on the extent of fuel poverty in England. Results from this will be published in the annual update of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy which should be published early in 2003.

Nuclear Power

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the proposals put forward by the European Commissioner de Palacio to the Commission on 6 November concerning the harmonisation of nuclear reactor safety and radioactive waste management across the EU. [80343]

Mr. Wilson: Officials in my Department and DEFRA are taking preliminary steps to assess the implications for the UK. It is important to remember that the proposals currently under discussion within the Commission could be changed significantly before any proposal is made to the Council.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what additional resources have been made available to her Office of Civil Nuclear Security following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. [80344]

Mr. Wilson: It has been agreed with the Treasury that the budget for the Office for Civil Nuclear Security will be increased by £200,000 for the financial year 2002–2003 and by £300,000 for the financial year 2003–2004

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the public consultation on the proposed revisions to civil nuclear security arrangements; how many responses were received; and if she will place copies of them in the Library. [80094]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has drawn up proposals for the Nuclear Industries Security Regulations which will provide a clarified and updated legislative basis for security regulation in the UK's civil nuclear industry.

The Department has carried out a public consultation exercise on the proposals and is considering the 27 responses it has received with a view to making the regulations as soon as possible.

The Department will publish a document summarising the responses received, and its responses to the points raised. As explained in the consultation document for the regulations, this will not identify individual responses. This is for security reasons. Nor will the summary document refer to issues with potential implications for operational security.

A copy of this document will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Liabilities Management Unit

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost of creating and operating the Liabilities Management Unit has been to date; and what the projected cost of the LMU until its dissolution is. [77298]

Ms Hewitt: Between 1 April and 30 September 2002, my Department spent £4.26m on setting up and running the Liabilities Management Unit. I expect the full cost for the 02–03 financial year to be around £10.9m. Similar annual expenditure is expected in the run up to the establishment of the Liabilities Management Authority.

Women's Rights

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women what assessment her Department has made of the recent Economic and Social Research Council Report on disparities in salaries between men and women. [78824]

Ms Hewitt: The Government welcome the ESRC's recent report, entitled "Diversity in Britain's Labour Market", as a contribution to the debate about women's earnings.

The report confirms that the pay gap has many complex causes. The government is tackling these underlying problems by encouraging equal pay reviews; introducing the annual Castle Awards and Fair Pay Champions and providing additional funding of £151,867 (on top of the initial £145,000) to trade unions, for training representatives in equal pay issues in the workplace. Work-Life Balance initiatives, the right to request reduced hours, improved and extended maternity rights and the National Childcare Strategy will also help to tackle both the full-time and part-time pay gap.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on *(a)* the work of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and *(b)* her Department's financial support for the Commission. [78665]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) plays an important role in promoting women's rights, developing follow up to the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and has a catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies and programmes of the UN system. It was established by the Economic and Social Council, which elects CSW's 45 members for four-year terms.

The UK is an active member of the Commission and takes a leading role in the development of its policy and work programme, reflecting the UK's commitment to promote gender equality. The UK sends a strong delegation to the annual session of the Commission in New York, including officials from the DTI, FCO and DfID, plus members of the Women's National Commission.

The Commission's operating costs are funded through the UN Regular Budget to which the UK contributes 5.6 per cent. (the total Regular Budget is $2,625 million per year). Additional voluntary UK funding is provided to support the work of the UN Secretariat to prepare for CSW. In 2002, this included £10,000 from DfID for development-related expert group meetings held in advance of CSW to facilitate discussion and help the Secretariat produce reports on the Commission's priority themes. In preparation for CSW's 2003 session DfID will provide similar funding for expert group meetings.

Trade Partners UK

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place in the Library a copy of the standard contract letter which is drawn up between Trade Partners UK and secondees from private companies before they start their secondment. [78150]

Ms Hewitt: Trade Partners UK is the Trade and Development arm of British Trade International—the joint DTI/FCO Trade Development and Inward Investments body. Depending on the nature of the secondment the contracts can be with either DTI or FCO. I have today arranged for the standard contract letter between the DTI and the secondee, and the standard contract between the Department and the company to be placed in the Library of the House. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has arranged for standard contract letters with the FCO also to be placed in the Library.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challon) of 31 October 2002. *Official Report*, 989, if she will define what the *(a)* commercial and *(b)* competitive bases are for supplying public services under the GATS agreement. [79906]

Ms Hewitt: The GATS agreement contains no definition of these terms. WTO Members retain the right to define their own public services.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [80361]

Ms Hewitt: Between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 a Departmental Special Adviser accompanied me to Brussels on one occasion, to Madrid on two occasions and to Washington on one occasion. It is not practicable separately to identify the cost of these visits, but each journey complied with the Civil Service Code.

Corporate Governance

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has made on the European Commission's plans to enhance regulation on corporate governance. [80042]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I welcome publication on 4 November 2002 by the Commission of the Report of the High Level Group of Company Law experts ("A Modern Regulatory Framework for Company Law in Europe") on matters related to company law and corporate governance. I recognise the considerable work that has gone into this against a very demanding timetable and will be reviewing its recommendations in detail.

I consider that the United Kingdom is well placed to contribute to the debate on corporate governance regulation within the European Union. Important UK initiatives include:

Publication of the White Paper ("Modernising Company Law") in July following completion of the Company Law Review last year;

An independent review of Non-Executive Directors led by Derek Higgs which began in April;

The work of the Co-ordinating Group on Audit and Accounting Issues which issued an Interim report in July;

and Review of the Regulatory Regime of the Accountancy Profession which published a consultation document in October 2002.

In order that this work can be reflected in the Commission's emerging plans. I have ensured that the Commission has been kept fully informed and aware of the ideas and thinking being generated by these, and other, domestic corporate governance initiatives through personal meetings and correspondence with the Commission, attendance at the Competitiveness Council on 30 September 2002 and follow up meetings at senior official level with the Commission.

Turkey

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to visit Turkey. [79933]

Ms Hewitt: I have no plans to visit Turkey in the immediate future.

EU Agency Workers Directive

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place in the Library a copy of the EC legal appraisal of the competence of the proposed agency workers draft directive to cover pay; and if she will make a statement. [76662]

Alan Johnson: I am not able to put the requested information in the House of Commons library. As we said in the Explanatory Memorandum which we laid before this house in May 2002, "there is an issue as to whether the directive can cover pay. The proposal applies an equal treatment principle to certain 'basic working and employment conditions' listed at article 3.1*(d)*, including 'pay'. However, Article 137(6) provides that, 'the provisions of this article shall not apply to pay'. In the light of this, the Government took the view when agreeing to directives 97/81/EC and 99/70/EC on part-time work and fixed term work respectively, that these directives, which also have article 137 as a legal base, could not cover pay. On the face of it, it seems difficult to reconcile the specific inclusion of pay in the directive with the provision in Article 137(6)." The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee has endorsed this approach, following a scrutiny debate on 10 July 2002.

Employment Tribunals

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make provision to enable employment tribunal cases to be heard in North Staffordshire; and if she will make a statement. [79007]

Alan Johnson: Unfortunately I have not been able to glean the information necessary to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases were referred to the employment tribunals in Shrewsbury for dispute resolution from Stoke-on-Trent in each of the last five years. [79009]

Alan Johnson: It is not possible to interrogate the Employment Tribunals Service database at the Shrewsbury tribunal office to ascertain this information and a manual search of the public register of applications could only be done at disproportionate cost.

However, a recent manual exercise which recorded the originating postcode of tribunal applications between 1 February and 28 June 2002 indicated that 275 cases came from postcode areas prefixed ST1–13 (covering Stoke-on-Trent and those surrounding ST postcode areas which fall within the jurisdiction of the Shrewsbury office). During the same period, the tribunals in England and Wales registered 31,609 applications.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will revise the map advising those travelling to the employment tribunal in Shrewsbury to include details of how to arrive by car and by public transport from Stoke-on-Trent. [79008]

Alan Johnson: Unfortunately I have not been able to glean the information necessary to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Electricity Disruption (Herefordshire)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set up an inquiry into the response of the electricity industry to the situation in Herefordshire caused by the storms of 26 and 27 October. [79980]

Mr. Wilson: I have already launched a study into the performance of companies in their handling of the storms.

It will look at:

the robustness of the networks

the preparations for the storms–acting on weather warnings

the comparisons of performance with previous storms and events

the telephone system and provision of information to customers

the automated information systems

the availability of management and deployment of staff and resources

the availability of materials and the companies' perception of lessons learned.

The findings will be mapped across to those of a study carried out earlier into the resilience and robustness of our electricity infrastructure.

Intellectual Property Rights

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will seek to lift restrictions on the export of generic drugs within the TRIPS Agreement at the WTO mini-ministerial meeting in Sydney on 14 November. [79726]

Ms Hewitt: The Doha "Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health" made clear that the TRIPS Agreement should be interpreted and implemented in such a way as to protect public health and promote access to medicines for all.

The EU is currently working with all WTO Members to find a solution to the issue of how WTO Members with insufficient manufacturing capacities in the pharmaceutical sector (mainly developing countries and Least Developed Countries) can make effective use of compulsory licensing under the TRIPS Agreement. We are hopeful that an effective and workable solution will be reached by the deadline of the end of the year.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what plans she has following the Commission on Intellectual Property rights report to call for a substantive review and revision of TRIPS; and what plans she has to recommend extending TRIPS implementation deadlines to all developing countries. [79727]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are currently considering the report of the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights (CIPR) and plans to respond to the recommendations contained in the CIPR report early in the New Year. However, the Government have no plans to call for substantive review and revision of TRIPS.

The TRIPS Agreement lays down procedures for extending implementation deadlines for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The general implementation deadline is 2005 but an extension to 2016 was agreed for pharmaceutical products at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha. There is no specific mechanism for extending TRIPS implementation deadlines for all developing countries.

The UK Government work through the EU on issues relating to the TRIPS Agreement. The UK Government support the development of objective criteria to form the basis upon which extensions on TRIPS transition periods should be agreed. The Government therefore support the introduction into TRIPS of a mechanism for extending transition periods for individual developing countries.

Airship Technology

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 31 October 2002, *Official Report*, c.963W, what support has been given to British companies in the development of airship technology that could be used for fixed mobile telecommunications purposes. [79970]

Mr. Timms: The Department has provided support to the development of airship technology through the Smart Exceptional Project scheme and its civil aeronautics research programme. The aim of the support has been to enhance technical capability for a number of potential applications, which could include mobile telecommunications purposes.

Regulation

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new regulations were imposed on UK businesses in each year since 1997–98. [79074]

Nigel Griffiths: The number of Statutory Instruments (SIs) that this Department has passed is as follows:

Year	*SIs*
1997	130
1998	135
1999	178
2000	148
2001	126
Jan-Oct 2002	100

Only a small proportion of SIs have a significant impact on business. Of the 100 SIs so far produced in 2002, 11 have produced benefits to business and 78 have had negligible or no impact. A regulatory impact assessment is produced for all SIs that have a cost to or benefit for business and copies are available from the Libraries of the House.

The information is currently being collated.

Export Licences

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licence applications for the export of mass spectrometers to Iran have been made in each year since 1997; how many applications have been granted; how much and what value of mass spectrometers have been exported to Iran in each year; what undertakings were sought about end-use; and what end-use monitoring has been undertaken. [78862]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy the letter in the Library of the House

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many high-risk products/dual use pathogens and component materials related to the production of chemical and biological warfare capabilities have been refused export licenses to *(a)* Israel, *(b)* Egypt and *(c)* Sudan since the implementation of the her Department's Dual Use Items (Export Control) Regulations in 2001. [79196]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of dual use pathogens is controlled under entries 1C351, 1C352, 1C353 and 1C354 of Council Regulations (EC) 1334/2000 and 1C992 of the Dual Use Items (Export Control) Regulations of 2000. The Dual Use Items (Export Control) Regulations 2000 came into force on 28 September 2000.

Between 28 September 2000 and 25 October 2002, no Standard Individual Export Licence applications or Open Individual Export Licence applications were refused, for items with the above ratings, where the end users were in Israel, Egypt or Sudan.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what applications for export licences have been made by BAE Systems/the British Aerospace group, and for which destinations, in the last five years for *(a)* Hawk aircraft and *(b)* spare parts for Hawk aircraft. [80323]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been issued, when and for which destinations, for *(a)* Hawk aircraft and *(b)* spare parts for Hawk aircraft in the last five years. [80322]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been issued in the last 10 years for *(a)* arms and *(b)* military supplies to Zimbabwe. [80326]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what applications for arms export licences have been made by *(a)* John Bredenkamp and *(b)* companies controlled by John Bredenkamp, and for which destinations in the last five years; and which of these applications for licences were granted. [80324]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what applications have been made in the last five years for licences for the export of *(a)* arms and *(b)* military supplies to the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and how many such licences were issued. [80327]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what applications for export licences have been received in the last five years for *(a)* arms and *(b)* military supplies to Zimbabwe. [80325]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many British export licences to Iraq have been authorised in the last 12 months. [79931]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many British export licences have been issued, and to which countries, in the last 12 months. [79932]

Nigel Griffiths: It would entail disproportionate cost to establish how many British export licences have been issued, and to which countries, in the last 12 months. However, details of all relevant British export licences are published by calendar year and destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls; copies of which are available from the Libraries of the House.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her assessment of the need for end-user controls within UK legislation on arms; and whether she plans secondary legislation under the Export Control Act 2002 that will introduce a more rigorous system of end-user controls. [79725]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government have made clear its commitment to effective monitoring of the end-use of UK defence exports where this can make a genuine contribution to preventing their diversion or misuse. However, follow-up monitoring can only confirm if UK exports have been misused or diverted *after* the export as taken place. We believe that the most effective way to prevent misuse or diversion of UK equipment is by rigorous assessment at the export licensing stage. To this end we have taken a number of steps to strengthen end-user risk assessment in the export licensing process. Before taking a decision on export licences, Ministers take into account all reliable information about end-users of potential concern, including reporting from other Government Departments and UK posts overseas, and also from any relevant information received from Non-Governmental Organisations and other external sources. Overseas posts have standing instructions to report any misuse of UK-origin defence equipment so that it can be taken into account in the licensing process. These measures do not require legislation and the Government does not therefore propose to include specific provisions on end-use monitoring in the secondary legislation to be introduced under the Export Control Act 2002.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the consultation period on secondary legislation on the Export Control Act 2002 will begin. [79722]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government expect to publish the draft orders they propose to make under the Export Control Act 2002 and an accompanying consultation document before the end of the year.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to propose legislation on arms covering the activites of UK arms brokers wherever they are located; and if she will make a statement; [79723]

(2) what plans she has for secondary legislation on the Export Control Act 2002 to cover extra-territorial controls on the activities of UK arms brokers. [79724]

Nigel Griffiths: The Export Control Act 2002 contains a new general power that allows controls to be introduced on arms trafficking or brokering (referred to in the Act as trade) by persons in the UK and UK persons overseas. The Government has stated that it will use these powers to introduce extra-territorial controls on trade in controlled goods to embargoed destinations, trade in equipment the export of which has already been banned because of evidence of its use in torture, and trade in long-range missiles.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licence applications for the export of furnaces to Iran have been made in each year since 1997; how many applications have been granted; how many and what value of furnaces have been exported to Iran in each year; what undertakings were sought about end-use; and what end-use monitoring has been undertaken. [78863]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how many licence applications for the export of inertial equipment using accelerometers to Iran have been made in each year since 1997; how many applications have been granted; how many and what value of such equipment have been exported to Iran in each year; what undertakings were sought about end-use; and what end-use monitoring has been undertaken. [78860]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how many licence applications for the export of maraging steels to Iran have been made in each year since 1997; how many applications have been granted; how much and what value of maraging steels have been exported to Iran in each year; what undertakings were sought about end-use; and what end-use monitoring has been undertaken. [78861]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Training Initiatives

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has taken place of *(a)* Stockholding 2000, *(b)* Export Strategy and *(c)* Benchmarking club training initiatives; what costs were associated with each project in each year since 1997–98; and if she will make a statement. [78268]

Ms Hewitt: It is not clear which initiatives the hon. Member is referring to. If he writes with further information I will respond in detail.

John Bredenkamp

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussion her Department's officials have had in the last three years with *(a)* John Bredenkamp and *(b)* companies controlled by John Bredenkamp. [80329]

Nigel Griffiths: Unfortunately I have not been able to answer before Parliament is prorogued, but I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what strategies her Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79295]

Ms Hewitt: All applications for employment in my Department are considered on their merits, against the criteria and competences specified for the advertised vacancies.

The Department's internal career development structure is governed by a diversity and equality policy which ensures that job opportunities are open to all staff regardless of their age. We are also working with the Employers Forum on Age to further develop initiatives and to share best practice with a range of public and private employers.

The normal age of retirement for staff in my Department is either 60 for the Senior Civil Service or 65 for other staff.

Departmental Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the schemes and initiatives sponsored by her Department and its agencies which are not the subject of national roll out, showing *(a)* the authorities or areas covered by the scheme and *(b)* the budget of the scheme in the last year for which information is available. [75674]

Ms Hewitt: Many DTI sponsored services are delivered at a regional and local level through Regional Development Agencies, Business Links and other local and regional organisations. These bodies often undertake local publicity campaigns for Government-sponsored services. To provide a list of this activity could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

My Department does run pilot schemes in certain localities from time to time, for example the SBS is currently piloting the City Growth Strategy in four regions in England (London, East Midlands, South West and North West). The total budget for this pilot is £1.5 million.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what public consultations have been commenced by her Department in each month since 10 September; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80274]

Ms Hewitt: The consultation documents published by the Department from 10 September until 5 November are as follows:

	Date Published	*Date Closes*
Consultation on Topics for Forsight Projects	10–09–02	04–12–02
Consultation on Competition Commission Monetary Penalties	18–09–02	16–12–02
Consultation on Competition Appeal Tribunal Draft	18–09–02	16–12–02
Possible Introduction Of "Promote" Licences To Encourage Exploration Activity On The UKCS	27–09–02	29–11–02
New award for 28 GHz licences. Broadband Fixed	15–10–02	14–11–02
Wireless Access (BFWA) at 2[illegible] GHz: proposals to amend new and existing licences and for the next stage of the award process Consultation on commencement dates for employment regulations	16–10–02	30–01–03

	Date Published	Date Closes
Equality and Diversity: The Way Ahead	23–10–02	24–01–03
Equality and Diversity: Making it Happen	23–10–02	24–01–03
Developing the National Performance Framework for Trading Standards services	30–10–02	21–01–03
Consultation on extending the Working Time Regulations to previously excluded sectors	31–10–02	31–01–03
Public Wireless Networks—Exemption of User Stations	04–11–02	21–02–03

All DTI Consultation documents are available on the Departmental Website at www.dti.gov.uk

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many successful prosecutions for failure to pay the national minimum wage there have been in *(a)* the London Borough of Enfield, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* the United Kingdom since its introduction; and if she will make a statement. [78088]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 contains a number of provisions empowering enforcement officers to take civil action against non-paying employers and the Inland Revenue always use these in the first instance.

Since the minimum wage was introduced in April 1999 the Inland Revenue has issued around 450 enforcement notices requiring employers to start paying the minimum wage and make good any arrears, and identified over £11 million in arrears. A minority of disputed cases have been considered by employment tribunals. To date there have been no criminal prosecutions in relation to underpayment of the minimum wage.

TREASURY

Fuel Duty

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer If he will make a statement on his policy on the rates of duty on biodiesel and bioethanol. [78237]

John Healey: All duty rates are reviewed annually as part of the Budget process. In doing so, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer takes into account a range of economic, social and environmental factors.

Tax Incentives (Pensions)

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on tax incentives for occupational pension schemes. [78238]

Ruth Kelly: The Government understand how important tax incentives are in encouraging retirement provision. The current pensions tax system is under review and we will consult on proposed changes later this year.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change tax incentives for pensions provision. [78257]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of earlier today to the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan)

Small Business

Mr. Baron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding the impact of taxes and his deregulation policy on small businesses. [78239]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor meets regularly with my right hon. Friend, at which time he discusses a full range of relevant issues, including the Government's success at reducing the corporate tax burden on companies and introducing such reforms as a R&D tax credit and improvements to the capital gains tax regime.

Dividend Tax Credits (Pension Funds)

Phil Sawford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the long-term implications are of the abolition of dividend tax credits for pension funds; and if he will make a statement. [78240]

Ruth Kelly: The withdrawal of payable tax credits on dividends was part of a package of reforms that included cuts in corporation tax and the abolition of advance corporation tax. These changes were designed to improve the climate for long-term investment in the UK. In the long run, this should benefit all investors—including pension funds and those saving for retirement.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has with other Ministers on the effects of his policies on pension funds. [78254]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers have many discussions with other Ministers on a range of matters, including pensions.

EU Stability Pact

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with other EU finance Ministers about the stability and growth pact. [78241]

Ruth Kelly: The Government support a prudent interpretation of the Stability Pact, which takes into account the impact of the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment. We continue to discuss this with our EU colleagues.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made on his five economic tests for euro entry of the effect of the operation of the stability and growth pact. [78249]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have consistently made clear that it supports a prudent interpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact that takes into account the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the differences between his rules governing the level of public spending and those operated within the stability pact adopted within the Eurozone. [78246]

Ruth Kelly: As set out in paragraph 2.65 of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report, the Budget 2002 projections are consistent with the Government's prudent interpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact which takes account of the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment (as specified in Article 104 of the EU Treaty).

Manufacturing Employment (North-West)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the change in the manufacturing employment in the North West in 2001. [78242]

John Healey: Manufacturing employment declined at a much slower rate in the North West than in the UK as a whole in the 12 months to June 2002, despite declining at a faster rate than in the UK as a whole through 2001.

BCCI

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received concerning the settlement arrangements for the creditors and ex-employees of BCCI. [78243]

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman wrote to the Paymaster General, who arranged for him to meet Inland Revenue officials recently to discuss the tax issues arising. I understand the meeting was a constructive and helpful one.

Overseas Aid Budget

Mr. Caton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the UK Overseas Aid Development budget to reach the UN target level of 0.7 per cent. of gross national income. [78244]

John Healey: The Government remain fully committed to reaching the UN 0.7 per cent. ODA/GNI target. In the 2002 Spending Review we made substantial increases to the aid budget. The UK's level of overseas development assistance will be increased to 0.33 per cent. by 2003/04, up from 0.26 per cent. in 1997, and will reach 0.40 per cent. of GNI by 2005/06. This is the largest ever increase in UK aid and represents a 93 per cent. real terms increase since 1997.

Aid effectiveness is also important as well as aid volumes. We are committed to redirecting the development assistance budget to the poorest countries, particularly those with effective governments pursuing high growth and pro-poor economic and social policies. In addition, we have untied all our aid as from 1 April 2001.

Debt Relief (Africa)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on debt relief in respect of those countries affected by famine in Africa. [78245]

John Healey: The Government are very concerned about food crises in Africa and is acting decisively to limit the impact of famine on those countries affected. We have already committed a total of £68 million for humanitarian assistance and recovery programmes to the region and will continue to monitor the situation closely. Of the eight countries currently affected by famine, 4 are already benefiting from US$11 billion of debt relief that has been committed under the HIPC initiative.

DfID's Southern Africa Humanitarian Crisis Unit (SAHCU) is currently being established in Johannesburg. The unit will assist the ongoing DfID response, carry out situation and needs assessments; and identify opportunities for further UK interventions if necessary.

As part of this commitment to providing humanitarian assistance, DfID is supporting infrastructure programmes, such as the rehabilitation of the rail link between the port of Nacala in Mozambique and land-locked Malawi. The improved link is essential to the special emergency operation being run by the World Food Programme on behalf of the Malawian government to get food to those most at need. The total cost of the programme is £4.26 million, £4.1 million of which will be funded by DfID.

In Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe food shortages have followed a poor season when coping mechanisms are already stretched. Poor governance has played a major role in the shortages, particularly in Zimbabwe where lack of inputs for small-holder agriculture, and the ruling party's disastrous economic and land policies, have both caused shortages and undercut survival strategies. Throughout the region HIV and AIDS has also weakened communities' capacity to cope with additional stress.

The crisis underlines the need for good governance in Africa. The three worst affected countries (Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe) have been hit by drought, but have also suffered in varying degrees from economic problems and poor governance, which have turned a fall in agricultural production into a crisis. The drought has been exacerbated by corruption in Zambia under the previous administration, poor management of food stocks in Malawi, and disastrous land and economic policies in Zimbabwe.

At the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank, the UK argued strongly that we should be prepared to use the flexibility in the HIPC initiative to provide additional debt relief to ensure a robust exit from unsustainable debt, particularly for those countries affected by extreme circumstances.

The Government is working to strengthen the HIPC initiative to help the most vulnerable countries. In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session last year, the Chancellor set out the UK's agenda for strengthening the HIPC initiative. In addition to pressing for more cautious forecasts to assess debt sustainability, the Chancellor stressed the importance of additional debt relief (or topping-up) at Completion Point for those countries which have

experienced external shocks such as natural disaster. In order to deliver these reforms, the UK has called for a further $1 billion to the HIPC initiative.

At Kananaskis the UK was at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief, helping to secure agreement from the G7 that they fund their share of the $1 billion financing shortfall in the HIPC initiative. The UK is the second largest donor to the HIPC Trust Fund, pledging over $300 million in total since 1999.

Ahead of the September meetings the UK made clear that, once again, we were prepared to shoulder our share of the burden, and called on other countries to follow our lead. The Development Committee welcomed these announcements of support and called upon other countries to make firm pledges and contributions as early as possible. I am pleased to report that, at a recent HIPC Technical Meeting in Paris, not only did the UK reaffirm its commitment to providing $120 million towards the $1 billion financing gap, but was joined by nearly all donors in making firm commitments totaling around $850 million.

Credit Unions

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to expand the role for credit unions. [78247]

Ruth Kelly: Credit unions have an important role to play in tackling financial exclusion and in providing greater choice and diversity in the financial services sector. That is why we have been involved in initiatives to help the movement grow and to enable credit unions to offer a greater range of services to their members.

We are in the process of delivering a programme of legislative and regulatory changes to help improve the operational flexibility of credit unions. Also, through the Financial Services and Markets Act, we have brought credit unions under the regulatory supervision of the Financial Services Authority and given depositors with credit unions similar protection to those with banks or building societies. The new regulatory system, combined with our programme of deregulation, will give the movement a strong position from which to build and thrive.

The Government will continue to work closely with the movement to support and encourage its future development.

Company Taxation

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Confederation of British Industry regarding the impact of company taxation on state UK businesses. [78248]

Dawn Primarolo: Treasury Ministers meet regularly with business leaders and others to discuss a wide range of topics.

Employment, Scotland

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future prospects for employment in Scotland. [78250]

Ruth Kelly: Since 1997 in Scotland, total employment has risen by 100,000 (or 4.4 per cent.) and claimant count unemployment has been reduced by 60,700 (or 37.4 per cent.).

The UK Government and the Scottish Executive have put in place a comprehensive range of policies designed to reduce unemployment and get people back into work. These policies have already paid dividends and, as the figures show, will continue to benefit the Scottish labour market into the future.

Environmental Taxation

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the need for further changes to the taxation system to help deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. [78252]

John Healey: The Government have introduced a range of fiscal measures to tackle carbon emissions, including the Climate Change Levy, and reforms to both Vehicle Excise Duty, fuel duties and the taxation of company cars. The Chancellor considers all relevant social, economic and environmental factors when deciding taxation policy.

Tax Concessions (Sports Clubs)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress he has made implementing his tax concessions scheme for community and amateur sports clubs. [78253]

John Healey: The legislation enabling community amateur sports clubs to benefit from certain tax reliefs was contained in Finance Act 2002. The Inland Revenue is now accepting applications for registration from qualifying sports clubs.

Landfill Tax

Tom Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans for landfill tax. [78255]

John Healey: The Government announced in Budget 2002 that we anticipate the need for significant increases to the landfill tax in the medium term and that we will take future decisions on the tax in the light of the report of the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit waste project, which is due to be published later this year.

National Insurance (Women)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Minister for Women and the Department of Work and Pensions regarding the position of women who paid national insurance contributions at the reduced rate for married women. [78256]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor discusses a wide range of issues with his Cabinet colleagues.

Deprived Communities

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to sponsor investment and enterprise in deprived communities. [78258]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to encouraging enterprise, investment and wealth creation across all regions in Britain.

We believe that enterprise can make a valuable contribution to the regeneration of disadvantaged communities, and bring significant benefits to these communities, such as new sources of employment for local people. In order to ensure that our most disadvantaged communities share in the country's rising prosperity, we have introduced a range of measures to encourage investment and enterprise in these areas. These include the Community Investment Tax Credit, the Bridges Community Development Venture Fund, the Phoenix Fund, and the introduction of an exemption from stamp duty for most property transactions in the 2000 most disadvantaged areas of the UK.

Many of the Government's other policies are contributing to the creation of an environment in which businesses can start and grow in disadvantaged areas, including policies to develop the skills of the workforce, help the unemployed into work and improve the planning regime.

Tax Credits

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Warwick and Leamington will benefit from the introduction of the working tax credit. [78259]

Dawn Primarolo: 1,829 families in Warwick and Leamington were receiving WFTC or DPTC on 31st May 2002.

The Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit, to be introduced in April 2003, are expected to benefit around 6 million families.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for levels of social exclusion of any inability of individuals in low income employment to access Tax Credits for the cost of higher level skills training in the information technology sector. [79837]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government recognises that improving the skills of the workforce plays an important part in reducing social exclusion. The financial assistance available to adult learners is being reviewed in the context of the development of the Government's Skills Strategy, which will be published next year. In addition, the Government keeps all taxes under review as part of the normal Budget process.

Pensioners

John Robertston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on measures to raise the standard of living of Britain's poorest pensioners. [78260]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 9 May 2002 (*Official Report*, 9 May 2002, column 339 W).

Unemployment (London)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the 12-month change in the claimant measure of unemployment in London. [78228]

Mr. Boateng: Despite a relatively small rise over the past year, claimant unemployment in London is more than 40 per cent. down since spring 1997.

Tax Residence and Domicile Rules

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount of foreign investment in the UK that results from the non-domicile tax rules. [78231]

Dawn Primarolo: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on Budget Day that we are reviewing the residence and domicile rules as they affect tax liabilities of individuals. We believe that modernisation of these rules needs to be based on clear principles: the rules should be fair, clear, easy to operate and support the competitiveness of the British economy. As part of the review, various fact-finding exercises will be carried out, drawing on a range of sources.

Private Finance Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish the full results of the retrospective application of the revised Treasury technical note, How to Account for PFI Transactions; and if he will make a statement. [74125]

Mr. Boateng: The results to date of the retrospective application of the revised Treasury Taskforce Technical Note are set out in the table below. The table shows, for all PFI contracts that were operational by the end of the 2001 02 financial year, the accounting treatment that has been adopted.

Department/Project	*Capital Value £million*	*Start of operation*	*Accounting Treatment*
DCMS			
Royal Parks Agency—Pembroke Lodge	1	1997	On
British Library—Catering Service	1	1998	Off
DETR			
Dartford Crossing	180	1987	On
Second Severn Crossing	331	1990	On
A50 DBFO Road	21	1996	On
A19 DBFO Road	29	1996	On
A40 DBFO Road	65	1996	On
A417/419 DBFO Road	49	1996	On
A30/35 DBFO Road	65	1996	On
A1(M) DBFO Road	128	1996	On

Department/Project	Capital Value £million	Start of operation	Accounting Treatment
M1/A1 Link DBFO Road	214	1996	On
A13 DBFO Road (Transferred to GLA)	146	2000	Off
Birmingham Northern Relief Road	485	1992	Off
LUL Northern Line Trains	409	1995	Off
LT Prestige (transferred to TfL)	137	1998	Off
QEIICC—Catering	3	1997	Off
DoH			
Queen Elizabeth Hospital—Woolwich	118	2001	Off
North East London Mental Health NHST—Reprovision and Geriatric Day Centre	11	2002	Off
Dartford & Gravesham NHST	94	2000	Off
South Buckinghamshire NHST	45	2000	On
West Sussex Health & Social Care NHST	22	2000	Off
Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital NHST	158	2001	Off
Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospital	17	2000	Off
North Staffordshire Combined NHST	19	2001	Off
Calderdale Healthcare NHST—redevelopment of services	65	2001	Off
North Durham Healthcare NHST	61	2001	Off
DTI			
ELGAR—IT service provision	30	1999	Off
Re-build of NPL	82	2000	Off
DWP			
ITSA	1	2000	Off
Newpay	6	1999	Off
IT Partnership Project	116	1998	Off
Home Office			
Parc Prison	47	1999	On
Altcourse Prison	68	1999	On
Lowdham Grange	25	1998	On
Ashfield (Pucklehurst) Prison	26	1999	On
Forest Bank Prison	45	2000	On
Rye Hill Prison	37	2001	On
Dovegate Prison	64	2001	On
Inland Revenue			
IR Manchester	32	1998	Off
IR Glasgow	10	1998	Off
IR Edinburgh	10	1998	Off
IR St. John's House Bootle	12	2000	Off
Newcastle Estates Development	163.8	1999	Off
Steps (joint IR with C&E)	220 (IR 157 and C&E 63)	2001	Off
LCD			
Court Service—Probate Records Centre Contract	11	1999	Off
LCD HQ—Libra	68	2001	Off
LCD—Aramis	40	1998	Off
Court Service—LOCCS	20	1996	On
MOD			
Attack Helicopter Training Service	165	2002	Off
Defence Helicopter Flying School	74	1998	On
Medium Support Helicopter Aircrew Training Facility	114	1999	Off
Joint Services Command and Staff College	93	2001	Married quarters Off. Main student/ residential facilities On
Training, Administration & Financial Management Information System	41	1998	Off
Electronic Messaging Services	17	1998	Off
Material Handling Equipment	8	1997	Off
Tornado GR4 Simulator	62	2002	Off
RAF Cosford/RAF Shawbury Family Quarters	15	2001	Off
Central Scotland Family Quarters	25	2001	Off
National Assembly for Wales			
A55 Llandegai to	112	1998	Off
National Savings			
PPP for Operational Services	37	2000	Off
Scottish Executive			
Skye Bridge	24	1997	Off
M6 DBFO	103	1999	Off

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate by how much public borrowing as a percentage of GDP would have to be raised to cover the capital expenditure of all current and past projects financed through PFI/PPP. [76012]

Mr. Boateng: It is estimated that, by the end of this year, the value of PFI/PPP contracts signed will increase private sector capital expenditure on public services to over £25 billion. Revised estimates are published annually in the Budget and updated during the financial year under arrangements agreed with the National Audit Office.

It is not possible to calculate accurately the increased level of public debt that would be created if these projects were funded instead by the public sector. That would depend on the way in which the project was taken forward. Since the abolition of universal testing, public authorities choose the method of procurement which is best suited to individual projects.

Partnerships UK

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the members of Partnerships UK and their interest in companies involved in past privatisation projects in each case. [78517]

Mr. Boateng: The private sector shareholders of Partnerships UK are as listed:

Abbey National Treasury Services plc
Sun Life Assurance Society plc (HSBC Global Custody Nominees (UK) Limited)
The Prudential Assurance Company Limited
Barclays Industrial Investments Limited
Royal Bank Project Investments Limited
The Governor and Company of Bank of Scotland (Uberior Investments plc)
Halifax Project Investments Limited
Serco Limited
The British Land Company plc (Boldswitch Limited)
Group 4 Falck Joint Venture Limited
Jarvis plc

The details of their holdings in the companies involved in past privatisations are not held centrally.

Mapeley

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) which IR and C and E buildings are owned by *(a)* Mapeley UK Ltd, *(b)* Mapeley Steps Ltd, *(c)* Mapeley Steps Contractor Ltd and *(d)* Mapeley Columbus Ltd; and whether the companies owning and maintaining the IR offices is based in Britain; [78519]

(2) what independent valuation was carried out on the Tax and Customs offices sold to Mapeley; and what it indicated the buildings were worth; [78537]

(3) how much stamp duty has been paid by Mapeley on the purchase of Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise Offices; [78518]

(4) what difference is between the amount the Inland Revenue will pay in rent each year to Mapeley and what it would have cost them if they still owned the buildings themselves. [78520]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* The information to answer the HM's question about the amount of stamp duty paid by the Mapeley consortium is covered by the Inland Revenue's legal duty of taxpayer confidentiality which is laid down by S182 of Finance Act 1989 which states, at sub section 1.

A person who discloses any information which he holds or has held in the exercise of tax functions, tax credit functions or social security functions is guilty of an offence if it is information about any matter relevant, for the purposes of any of those functions.

Valuation of the Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise buildings was carried out as part of the STEPS process by independent valuers. This was performed by Insignia Richard Ellis in conjunction with Gerald Eve. Their opinion of Market Value was £370 million.

Under the Mapeley contract the Inland Revenue pays Mapeley STEPS Contractor Ltd for the provision of fully serviced accommodation. A full appraisal was done at the time of the contract and that appraisal indicated that there would be a significant benefit to the Departments from the proposed arrangement over the lifetime of the contract compared with the status quo at that time.

The table below lists the Departments' properties which (with three exceptions) were transferred to Mapeley STEPS Ltd which is registered in Bermuda. The three exceptions were Custom House Southampton, Rutland House Bradford and 23 Piccadilly York which were sold to Mapeley STEPS Contractor Ltd which is UK registered. Some buildings were considered to be of particular importance (including primarily buildings of historical significance) and were not sold. Those properties within this category over which Mapeley STEPS Ltd are granted a long lease are included on the list. The maintenance and day to day services are provided by Mapeley STEPS Contractor Ltd which is a UK registered company.

Department	*Property Address*	*Tenure*
HMCE	Garage, 60 Inchinnan Road, Paisley, Strathclyde, PA3, Scotland	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, Killyhevlin, Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, BT74 4EJ, Northern Ireland	Leasehold
HMCE	Portcullis House, No4 Gate, Southampton, Hampshire, SO14 3NT, England	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, Orchard Place, Southampton, Hampshire, SO14 3NS, England	Freehold
HMCE	Chaucer's Walk, Furthergate Industrial Park, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 3AF, England	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, The Strand, St. Marys, Isles of Scilly, Cornwall, TR21 0PS, England	Freehold
HMCE	44 York Place, Edinburgh, Lothian, EH1 3JW, Scotland	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, Custom House Quay, Greenock, Strathclyde, PA15 1EQ, Scotland	Leasehold
HMCE	24 West Argyll Street, Ullapool, Highland, IV26 2UB, Scotland	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, 10 Harbour Terrace, Wick, Highland, KW1 5HB, Scotland	Freehold
HMCE	Priory Court, St. John's Road, Dover, Kent, CT17 9SH, England	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, Lower Thames Street, London, Greater London, EC3R 6EE, England	Leasehold

Department	Property Address	Tenure
HMCE	C&E Garage & Wreck Shed, Crittens Road, Cobholm, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, NR30 1HZ, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Custom House—Gravesend, The Terrace, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 2BW, England	Freehold
HMCE	The Watch House, Watch House Lane, Cowes, Isle of Wight, PO31 7QH, England	Freehold
HMCE	Eaton Court, 104–112 Oxford Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 7FU, England	Freehold
HMCE	Garrison Point, Sheerness Docks, Sheerness, Kent, ME12 1PB, England	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, 90–100 Albion Street, South Wick, Shoreham, East Sussex, BN4 4EE, England	Freehold
HMCE	Queens Dock, Kings Dock (off Chaloner Street), City Centre, Liverpool, Merseyside, L74 4AA, England	Freehold
HMCE	Portcullis House, 27 Victoria Avenue, Southend, Essex SS2 6AL, England	Freehold
HMCE	Phoenix House, 1 Wards Road, Elgin, Grampian, V30 1QL, Scotland	Freehold
HMCE	Portcullis House, New Harbour Road South, Poole, Dorset, BH15 4AJ, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Custom House, Furness Quay, Salford, Manchester, Greater Manchester, M5 2XX, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Bretonside Garage, 29 Bretonside, Plymouth, Devon, PL4 0BB, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Boundary House, Cheadle Point, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 2JZ, England	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, Newhaven Harbour, Newhaven, East Sussex, BN9 0BD, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Multi Storey Car Park, Baxter Avenue, Southend, Essex SS2 9XX, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Custom House, Alexandra Dock, Kings Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 1LR, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Custom House, The Parade, Barbican, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 2JP, England	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, Queens Quay, Londonderry, County Derry, BT48 7AR, Northern Ireland	Freehold
HMCE	Carne House, 20 Corry Place, Belfast, County Antrim, BT3 9HY, Northern Ireland	Leasehold
HMCE	Custom House, Queens Square, Belfast, County Antrim, BT1 3ET, Northern Ireland	Leasehold
HMCE	Lingate House, 102 Chapel Lane, Wigan, Greater Manchester, WN3 4BJ, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Northstar House, Great North Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear, England	Freehold
HMCE	Computer Complex, Campfield Road, Shoeburyness, Essex, SS3 9BX, England	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, Clayton Street, Avonmouth, Avon, BS11 9DX, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Custom House, View Point Road, Felixstowe Dock, Felixstowe, Suffolk, IP11 8RF, England	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, Main Road, Dovercourt, Harwich, Essex, CO12 3PG, England	Freehold
HMCE	Pontoon Pier & Jetties, Custom House, The Terrace, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 2BW, England	Freehold
HMCE	East Lock, Alexandra Dock, Newport, Gwent, NP9 2NP, Wales	Leasehold
HMCE	Custom House, Heathrow, Nettleton Road, Heathrow Airport, Hounslow, Greater London, TW6 2LA, England	Leasehold
HMCE	Custom House, Carnbane Way, Carnbane Industrial Estate, Newry, County Down, BT35 6QG, Northern Ireland	Freehold
HMCE	Garage (Portline House), 2–16 Pope Street, London, Greater London, SE1 3PR, England	Freehold
HMCE	Towergate, 163 Towerbridge Road, London, Greater London, SE1 3LT, England	Freehold
HMCE	Chaucer House, 12 Vikingway, Church Manor Way, Erith, Kent, DA8 1EW, England	Freehold
IR	Crown Building, 47 Clarendon Road, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD1 1HC, England	Freehold
IR	Lyndhurst House, 120 Bunns Lane, London, Greater London, NW7 2AP, England	Freehold
IR	Gracemead House, Woods Avenue, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 8NJ, England	Freehold
IR	Crown Building, 41–55 Windmill Hill, Ruislip, Greater London, HA4 8BR, England	Freehold
IR	Park House, 22 Park Street, Croydon, Surrey, CR9 1UX, England	Leasehold
IR	Woolwich Crown Building, 48 Woolwich New Road, Woolwich, London, Greater London, SE18 6DY, England	Freehold
IR	Charles House, 375 Kensington High St., London, Greater London, W14 8QS, England	Leasehold
IR	Kew Sorting Centre, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DW, England	Freehold
IR	Bush House S.W.Wing, Strand, London, Greater London, WC2 4RD, England	Leasehold
IR	Newton Road, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 6RH, England	Freehold
IR	Iceni House, Newland Street, Witham, Essex, CM8 2AX, England	Freehold
IR	Dencora Court, Tylers House, Tylers Ave, Southend, Essex, SS1 2BE, England	Freehold
IR	Bowback House, 299 Silbury Boulevard, Witan Gate West, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK9 1NG, England	Freehold
IR	Saxon House, 1 Causeway Lane, Leicester, Leicestershire, LE1 4AA, England	Freehold
IR	Portman Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP2 2ED, England	Freehold
IR	Bondgate Hall, Bondgate Without, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 1PX, England	Freehold
IR	Foyle House, Duncreggan Road, Londonderry, County Derry, BT48 0AA, Northern Ireland	Freehold
IR	Downshire House, Merchants Quay, Newry, County Down, BT35 6HS, Northern Ireland	Freehold
IR	Dorchester House, 52–58 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, County Antrim, BT2 7BB, Northern Ireland	Freehold
IR	Warwick House, Grantham Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear, NE2 1QH, England	Freehold
IR	Albion House, Northway, Scarborough, North Yorkshire, YO12 7AN, England	Freehold
IR	23 Piccadilly, York, North Yorkshire, YO1 1PG, England	Freehold
IR	Fern House, 1A Adelaide Avenue, Coleraine, County Derby, BT52 1AJ, Northern Ireland	Freehold
IR	Abbey House, Head Street, Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, BT74 7JL, Northern Ireland	Freehold
IR	63 College Street, St. Helens, Merseyside, WA10 1TN, England	Freehold
IR	Dukes House, 34 Hoghton Street, Southport, Merseyside, PR9 0RJ, England	Freehold
IR	Eskdale House, Shap Road, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 6RF, England	Freehold
IR	Birchen House, 2 Hamilton Street, Birkenhead, Merseyside, L41 6QS, England	Freehold
IR	Towneley House, Kingsway, Burnley, Lancashire, BB1 1AA, England	Freehold
IR	Albert Bridge House, 1 Bridge Street, Manchester, Greater Manchester, M60 9AF, England	Freehold
IR	Bridgeman House, Bridgeman Terrace, Wigan, Greater Manchester, WN1 1TR, England	Leasehold
IR	Stone Cross House, 21–27 Churchgate, Bolton, Greater Manchester, BL1 1YA, England	Freehold
IR	Comben House, Bridle Road, Netherton Estate, Netherton, Sefton MBC, Merseyside, L30, England	Leasehold
IR	Ruby House, 8 Ruby Place, Aberdeen, Grampian, AB9 2ZP, Scotland	Freehold
IR	Russell House, King Street, Ayr, Strathclyde, KA8 0BD, Scotland	Leasehold
IR	2 Muiryhall Street, Coatbridge, Strathclyde, ML5 3EJ, Scotland	Freehold
IR	St. Mungo's Road, Cumbernauld, Strathclyde, G70 5TR, Scotland	Freehold

Department	Property Address	Tenure
IR	Anchorage House, High Street, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4QR, England	Freehold
IR	Medval House, Mote Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME15 6AE, England	Freehold
IR	8 Ogle Road, Southampton, Hampshire, SO14 7HY, England	Freehold
IR	IRO Durrington, Barrington Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN12 4XL, England	Freehold
IR	Durrington Bridge House, Barrington Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN12 4SE, England	Freehold
IR	Northbank House, North Road, Bideford, Devon, EX39 2NX, England	Freehold
IR	Westgate House, North Street, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 3PL, England	Freehold
IR	Revenue Buildings, Chequergate, Louth, Lincolnshire, LN11 0LL, England	Freehold
IR	Crown House, 50–52 Scalford Road, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, LE13 1JL, England	Freehold
IR	11–21 Millgate, Newark, Nottinghamshire, NG24 4XW, England	Freehold
IR	Inland Revenue Accounts Office, Victoria Street, Shipley, West Yorkshire, BD98 8AA, England	Freehold
IR	Government Buildings, Holland Road, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 1UJ, England	Freehold
IR	Holland House, 17 High St, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 1TS, England	Freehold
IR	Huntingdon Court, 90–94 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, NG1 3HG, England	Freehold
IR	Joseph Locke House, Heelis Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S70 1LG, England	Freehold
IR	Symons House, Belgrave Street, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS2 8DD, England	Freehold
IR	Lawress Hall, Riseholme Park, Riseholme, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, LN2 2BJ, England	Leasehold
IR	Chaucer House, Commercial St, Off Station St, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, NG18 1SY, England	Freehold
IR	Castle Meadow Campus, Castle Meadow Road, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, NG2 1BE, England	Freehold
IR	161 Brooms Road, Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, DG1 3EX, Scotland	Freehold
IR	Auchincraig House, Argyll Road, Dunoon, Strathclyde, PA23 8ED, Scotland	Freehold
IR	Meldrum House, 15 Drumsheugh Gardens, Edinburgh, Lothian, EH3 7UY, Scotland	Freehold
IR	Grayfield House, Bankhead Ave, Edinburgh, Lothian, EH11 4AE, Scotland	Freehold
IR	1 Barrack Street, Hamilton, Strathclyde, ML3 0HS, Scotland	Freehold
IR	51 North Bridge Street, Hawick, Borders, TD9 9QH, Scotland	Freehold
IR	9 King Street, Rothesay, Strathclyde, PA20 0DE, Scotland	Freehold
IR	1–3 Water Vennel, Perth, Tayside, PH1 5UD, Scotland	Freehold
IR	Moray House, East Cathcart Street, Buckie, Grampian, AB5 1AN, Scotland	Freehold
IR	Saltire House, Pentland Park, Glenrothes, Fife, KY6 2AL, Scotland	Freehold
IR	Marress House, Friars Croft, Irvine, Strathclyde, KA12 8EE, Scotland	Freehold
IR	Meadowbank Street, 15 Meadowbank Street, Dumbarton, Strathclyde, G82 3JR, Scotland	Freehold
IR	Queensway House, Stewartsfield Way, Peel Park, Eastkilbride, Strathclyde, G79 1AA, Scotland	Freehold
IR	34–36 Wellesley Road, Ashford, Kent, TN24 8EN, England	Freehold
IR	Vespasian House, Bridport Road, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1PX, England	Freehold
IR	Madford House, Madford Lane, Launceston, Cornwall, PL15 9EG, England	Leasehold
IR	Penlowarth, St. Marys Terrace, Penzance, Cornwall, TR18 4EB, England	Freehold
IR	Lysnoweth, Infirmary Hill, Truro, Cornwall, TR1 2JD, England	Freehold
IR	20 Priory Road, Wells, Somerset, BA5 1TB, England	Freehold
IR	The Apex, 2 Brest Road, Derriford Business Park, Plymouth, Devon, PL6 5XX, England	Freehold
IR	Penhaligon House, Trinity Street, St. Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5BG, England	Freehold
IR	Sherborne House, Kingsteignton Road, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ12 2PF, England	Freehold
IR	Piran House, Nettles Hill, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1SN, England	Freehold
IR	Horsefair House, 35 King Street, Alfreton, Derbyshire, DE55 9BR, England	Freehold
IR	Rutland House, 116 Manningham Lane, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD8 7JW, England	Freehold
IR	Crown House, Heaton Street, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, DN21 2BJ, England	Freehold
IR	Ty Glyn, High Street, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 1YN, Wales	Freehold
IR	Government Buildings, 48 Free Street, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7BP, Wales	Freehold
IR	Ty Glas, Ty Glas Road, Llanishen, Cardiff, South Glamorgan, CF4 5ZD, Wales	Freehold
IR	Government Buildings, 1 Cherry Grove, Haverfordwest, Dyfed, SA61 2NW, Wales	Freehold
IR	Government Buildings, Castle Street, Merthyr Tydfil, Mid-Glamorgan, CF47 8SX, Wales	Freehold
IR	11 Chepstow Road, Newport, Gwent, NP9 8WA, Wales	Freehold
IR	Ty Moelwyn, Britannia Terrace, Porthmadog, Gwynedd, LL49 9NB, Wales	Freehold
IR	Ty Nant, 180 High Street, Swansea, West Glamorgan, SA1 5AP, Wales	Freehold
IR	Dolanog House, 24 Severn Road, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DA, Wales	Freehold
IR	Plas Gororau, Wrexham Technology Park, Wrexham, Clwyd, LL13 7YY, Wales	Leasehold
IR	Inland Revenue House, Parabola Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 3BE, England	Freehold
IR	Lower Leys, Burford Road, Bengeworth, Evesham, Hereford & Worcester, WR11 5AE, England	Freehold
IR	Broadway House, 32/35 Broad Street, Hereford, Hereford & Worcester, HR4 9AZ, England	Freehold
IR	Jephson House, Newbold Terrace, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 4EJ, England	Freehold
IR	Plas Ffynnon, 12/14 Middleton Road, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY11 2PW, England	Freehold
IR	Bennfield House, 12 Corporation Street, Rugby, Warwickshire, CV21 2DP, England	Freehold
IR	Crown Building, Alcester Road, Stratford On Avon, Warwickshire, CV37 9BU, England	Freehold
IR	Merrywalks House, 2 The Hill, Merrywalks, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL5 1QD, England	Freehold
IR	Crown House, Birch Street, Wolverhampton, West Midlands, WV1 4JY, England	Freehold
IR	Powell House, Church Street, Nuneaton, Warwickshire, CV11 4DS, England	Freehold
IR	Old Meb Buildings, Riddings Road, Ludlow, Shropshire, SY6 1TF, England	Freehold
IR	Boyd House 1, Lawn Central, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 4HQ, England	Freehold
IR	Matheson House, Grange Central, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 4ER, England	Freehold
IR	Boyd House II, Lawn Central, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 4HQ, England	Freehold
VOA	34 Southway, Colchester, Essex, CO2 7BB, England	Freehold
VOA	Wagonway Rd, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 1QL, England	Freehold
VOA	Darwin House, 2 The Mount, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY3 8PU, England	Leasehold
VOA	6 Dormer Place, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 5AF, England	Freehold
HMCE	Custom House, 18 Quay Walls, Berwick, Northumberland, TD15 1HB, England	Freehold

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Department	Property Address	Tenure
HMCE	Custom House, Hedon Road, King George Dock West, Hull, Humberside, HU9 5PW, England	Leasehold
VOA	Charnwood House, Charnwood Road, Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, DG1 3AG, Scotland	Freehold

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what renegotiation is taking place on the Inland Revenue Customs STEPS contract with Mapeley; and who initiated it. [80217]

Dawn Primarolo: Discussions have taken place between the Departments and Mapeley following an approach from the company.

Social Fund Budget

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will increase the Social Fund budget, with particular reference to *(a)* the Community Care Grant and *(b)* the Budgeting Loan budgets. [79214]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are examining options to enable the Social Fund better to fulfil its aim of helping the poorest and most vulnerable people in society meet certain needs.

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce fiscal incentives to encourage consumers to purchase and use combined electric and petrol engine powered vehicles. [79409]

John Healey: The Government have introduced fiscal incentives for the purchase of combined electric and petrol powered vehicles through discounts in vehicle excise duty and company car tax.

Furthermore, the Government are also promoting the use of cleaner fuels through schemes such as the PowerShift programme, which offers grants for motorists to buy or convert vehicles which run on LPG, natural gas or electricity.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal incentives he has made available for the wider use of alternative fuels for motor vehicles. [78229]

John Healey: In successive Budgets, the Chancellor has introduced a number of initiatives to promote the use of cleaner fuels. These include duty differentials for road fuel gases and bio-diesel, discounts to vehicle excise duty for cars using cleaner fuels, and the environment-focused changes to the company car tax system.

Furthermore, the Government continues to promote the use of cleaner fuels through schemes such as the PowerShift programme, which offers grants for motorists to buy or convert vehicles which run on LPG, natural gas or electricity, and the Green Fuel Challenge which is supporting projects for the development of biogas, ethanol and hydrogen through duty reliefs.

VAT Compliance Costs

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 352W, on VAT, for what reason he is unable to give a publication date; and if he will make a statement. [79517]

John Healey: Ministers are considering the research methodology, data and analysis in this research, in accordance with their continuing commitment to reduce compliance costs for VAT—registered businesses.

Gift Aid

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value of shares given in Gift Aid was in the last tax year. [79105]

John Healey: There is no Gift Aid scheme on gifts of shares. However, Budget 2000 introduced relief at a taxpayer's marginal tax rate on gifts of shares and other qualifying investments.

The value of shares and other qualifying investments given to charities in 2000–01 is estimated at £100 million.

Regional GDP

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government are taking to decrease disparities in regional gross domestic product per capita; and which Minister is in charge of these efforts. [79322]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 7 November 2002]:* The Government set out in the 2002 Spending Review White Paper (Cm 5570) the steps which it is taking to promote prosperity in every region of the UK. Given the Government's long term ambition to reduce the persistent gap in performance between regions, the Spending Review established a new Public Service Agreement target to make sustainable improvements in the economic performance of all English regions and over the longer term reduce the persistent gap in growth rates between the regions. This target, as described in full in the 2002 Spending Review White Paper, is jointly owned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, DTI and the Treasury. Devolved policies are the responsibility of the devolved administrations.

Third World Debt

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on recent measures he has taken to reduce third world debt. [78234]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chancellor to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) earlier today.

Census

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the groups recognised in Census 2001 with numbers of less than 700,000 as recorded in the 1991 Census; which groups other than Sikhs requested separate monitoring for the Census 2001 but were denied their request; and which groups recognised

in law as distinct ethnic groups requested separate monitoring for the Census 2001 but were denied their request. [78212]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Menzies Campbell, dated 7 November 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the groups recognised in the 2001 Census with numbers of less than 700,000 as recorded in the 1991 Census; which groups other than Sikhs requested separate monitoring for the 2001 Census but were denied their request; and which groups recognised in law as separate ethnic groups requested separate monitoring for the Census but were denied their request.

Those ethnic group categories identified in the 2001 Census question on ethnic group by a separate tick box responses, but for which less than 700,000 responses had been recorded in the 1991 Census question, were:

Mixed White and Black/Caribbean

Mixed White and Black African

Mixed White and Asian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Black Caribbean

Black African

Chinese

The matter of determining which ethnic group categories should be specifically identified in the 2001 Census resulted from a programme of wide consultation with census users on their requirements for information and with representatives of the various ethnic communities, and of extensive small- and large-scale testing of potential questions, including a major Census Test in 1997 and the Census Rehearsal in 1999.

The question that was eventually proposed in the Government's White Paper on the 2001 Census in March 1999 and which was subsequently included in the 2001 Census in England and Wales, following approval by Parliament, had been revised in consultation with users, both to meet their requirements for additional information, particularly about the Irish population in Great Britain and people of mixed origin, and to be as acceptable as possible to respondents.

Special attention had been given to using words or terms that encompassed the widest range of attributes including birthplace, race and cultural characteristics.

The new response categories were such as to provide optimum comparability with the 1991 Census question while, at the same time, attempting to improve response to the question particularly among those communities who, tests had shown, preferred to describe themselves as "Black British" or "Asian British".

Prior to the 2001 Census, a number of representations were made to ONS to include in the ethnic group question, additional tick boxes response categories for the purpose of recognising particular groups. Other than those from the Sikh community, these included representations concerning the following groups that could not, in the event, be included in the question, either because there was not a sufficiently wide enough user support or because the case was made too late:

Welsh

English

Cornish

Kashmiri

Arab

Greek

Turkish

Kurdish

Cypriot

Vietnamese

Gypsies/Travellers

However no such group—whether or not subject to any lawful recognition as an ethnic group—was denied the opportunity of being recognised as such in the 2001 Census, since the form of the ethnic group question provided for write-in responses within each of the main groups in order to allow persons to describe their ethnicity in whichever way they chose. I announced at the time of the Census that such responses would be identified in coding and that counts would be made available in the results if there were a user requirement for the information.

Additional and specific information on Sikhs was, however, collected in the 2001 Census through the new question on religion.

Tax Fraud

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the present practice of the Board of Inland Revenue is with regard to instituting criminal proceedings in cases of suspected serious tax fraud. [80100]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Further to the statement made on 18 October 1990 at column 882 by the then Chancellor, the right hon. John Major, the practice of the Board of Inland Revenue in cases of suspected serious tax fraud is as follows:

The Board reserves complete discretion to pursue prosecutions in the circumstances it considers appropriate.

Where serious tax fraud has been committed, the Board may accept a money settlement instead of pursuing a criminal prosecution.

The Board will accept a money settlement and will not pursue a criminal prosecution, if the taxpayer, in response to being given a copy of this Statement by an authorised officer, makes a full and complete confession of all tax irregularities.

Royal Mint

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1030w, on the Royal Mint; if he will make a statement on progress on the independent review. [74288]

Ruth Kelly: The independent review has now been completed.

Mr. Simon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many meetings each of the Royal Mint's non-executive directors have attended in the last 12 months. [78340]

Ruth Kelly: The table shows the number of occasions on which each of the Royal Mint's non-executive directors have been able to attend meetings of the Board and Audit Committee in the last year (period covered 1 November 2001 to 31 October 2002).

	Management Board	*Audit Committee*
David Stark	6	2
Lyndon Hadden	6	2
Jan Smith	6	2
David Trapnell	5	1
Lucy Woods	2	–

The non-executive directors' contribution of course goes much wider than this, offering advice and challenge in less formal ways.

Mr. Simon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the *(a)* statutory, *(b)* economic and *(c)* security reasons preventing the Treasury from splitting its contract for circulating coins between manufacturer, design and specification. [78347]

Ruth Kelly: The Royal Mint, a government department financed by a trading fund, is the part of central government currently responsible for the manufacture and issue of UK circulation coins. It carries out these functions in agreement with HM Treasury as the department with overall responsibility for the economy and financial affairs. The Royal Mint Advisory Committee, a separate public body, the members of which are appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of the Chancellor, is currently responsible for advice on coin design.

Mr. Simon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the Royal Mint's fixed costs are covered by its Treasury contract for UK coin production in 2001–2002. [78345]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Royal Mint is benefiting from the contribution to overheads made on its monopoly circulating coin contract with the Treasury to price down overseas contracts in competition with the privately owned Birmingham Mint. [78343]

Ruth Kelly: The detail of the Royal Mint's agreement with the Treasury for the supply of domestic circulating coin is commercially confidential and cannot be disclosed in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The agreement is a challenging one for the Mint, providing a commercial rate of return below that expected of the business overall. The Mint believes that there is no cross-subsidisation involved between the UK circulating coin element of the business and the overseas business, and is preparing with the involvement of the National Audit Office a confidential note for the Public Accounts Committee which sets out the evidence.

Mr. Simon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* statutory and *(b)* security issues preclude the Treasury from putting out to tender its requirement for (i) UK circulating coins and (ii) manufacture of blanks-for-sterling coins. [78338]

Ruth Kelly: There are no insurmountable statutory obstacles to putting the arrangements for the supply of circulation coins out to tender. Of key importance however is security of supply.

The Treasury keeps the arrangements for the supply of circulation coins under review. The current arrangements with the Royal Mint have several years to run. They are designed to enable both the Treasury and the Mint to plan for the medium term on a commercial basis, and to ensure a cost-effective supply of coins to meet demand.

It is only finished coins that are obtained from the Royal Mint. Whether to purchase blanks from outside sources, for use in the production of UK circulation coinage, is a commercial decision for the Mint.

Mr. Simon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which joint ventures have been *(a)* concluded and *(b)* disbanded by the Royal Mint in the period since December 1999. [78341]

Ruth Kelly: The Royal Mint enters into and terminates a wide variety of business relationships, contracts and other ventures.

Mr. Simon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what the *(a)* sales and *(b)* revenue forecasts for (i) UK and (ii) overseas coin sales the Capital Investment Programme for the Royal Mint in 1997 to 2000 was based. [78342]

Ruth Kelly: The underlying internal commercial assumptions and forecasts used were drawn from the Royal Mint's Corporate Plan and based on the experience of management at the time.

Mr. Simon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions the Royal Mint has bought in coin blanks in the last five years, and what the quantity has been in each of these cases. [78339]

Ruth Kelly: The following table gives the number of contracts awarded for circulating coin blanks for the last 5 years together with the total quantity ordered in each year.

	Contracts	*Tonnes*
2001–02	2	3
2000–01	6	559
1999–00	—	—
1998–99	8	1737
1997–98	4	715

Inheritance Tax

Nick Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to my hon. Friend Member for Truro and St. Austell Matthew Taylor of 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 600W, on inheritance tax, if he will break down the cost of the inheritance tax cultural exemption scheme; and what the value was of each object accepted. [78648]

Dawn Primarolo: The breakdown is as follows:

	Yield + / Cost −
Net effect of conditional exemption (relief £8 million, less tax clawed back in respect of items losing conditional exemption £10 million)	+ £2 million
Tax value of items accepted in lieu of tax	− £8 million
Cost of other heritage reliefs (private treaty sales and maintenance funds)	− £2 million
Net cost for 2001–2002	− £8 million

These costs are recorded for the year in which all heritage aspects of a particular case are settled. Details of items accepted in lieu of tax, and the tax they can settle, are published by the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries by reference to the year (often earlier) when an acceptance is agreed. Their 2000–2002 Report can be found at http://www.resource.gov.uk/action/ail/OOail.asp.

Exemption 15 (Statutory and other restrictions) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies to the value of objects taken into account for purposes of the other heritage reliefs.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his Department's projected income from stamp duty on share transactions is for *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* each of the next three financial years; and what income has been received in each financial year since 1997. [79099]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the Stamp Duty projections are not published. Stamp Duty receipts arising from transactions in shares and other securities, for the financial years since 1997, are given on the Inland Revenue website at: http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/stamp—duty/sd—t01—1.htm.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the European Commission on stamp duty. [80212]

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with the European Commission regarding his proposed policy of abolishing stamp duty on commercial properties in rundown areas; and when he expects approval to be given. [80379]

John Healey: The extension of the stamp duty relief for non-residential property in disadvantaged areas is a key part of the Government's overall drive to regenerate deprived areas. We have already exempted from stamp duty all property transactions in disadvantaged areas where the consideration is less than £150,000.

We now want to extend that relief to exempt all non-residential properties in disadvantaged areas.

Officials have been pursuing full approval of this relief as state aid since we notified the measure to the European Commission. In addition, I met Commissioner Monti in September to discuss our application for approval as state aid of this measure. As part of a wider discussion on a range of issues, the Chancellor discussed this issue with Commissioner Monti in October.

The European Commission is currently conducting a thorough review of our application. Clearly we cannot pre-empt the timing of state aid approval since this is a matter for the European Commission.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many applications have been received for relief from stamp duty on houses worth less than £150,000; [80382]

(2) what he estimates the total amounts of stamp duty is that purchasers have saved from the abolition of stamp duty on houses worth less than £150,000. [80378]

John Healey: Between the implementation of the relief at the end of November 2001 and the end of August 2002, relief had been granted for around 35,000 residential properties. This figure does not include transactions where the consideration is less than £60,000 since these are not currently chargeable to stamp duty.

Forecasts of the amount of stamp duty exemption for disadvantaged areas were given in table A2.1 of the Budget 2002 report and will be updated in the Pre-Budget Report.

Mr. Flight: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate to how many purchases last year his proposed policy of abolishing stamp duty on commercial properties in rundown areas would have applied had it been in operation; [80375]

(2) how many commercial properties he estimates his proposed policy of abolishing stamp duty on commercial properties in rundown areas would apply to. [80376]

John Healey: The number of properties affected by the proposed policy depends on market conditions in the affected areas but is estimated to be in the order of 1,000 a year.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provision he has made to encourage urban regeneration in the event that the European Commission rejects his proposed policy of abolishing stamp duty on commercial properties in rundown areas. [80377]

John Healey: We continue to work closely with the European Commission to progress our application for state aid approval for the extension of the existing relief from stamp duty in disadvantaged areas which is part of a wider package of measures designed to regenerate the most deprived areas of the UK.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much tax revenue he estimates the Treasury saved last year through purchasers failing to apply for relief from stamp duty on purchases of properties worth less than £150,000; [80373]

(2) how many purchasers he estimates since the inception of the scheme could have applied for relief from stamp duty on purchases of houses worth less than £150,000 but failed to. [80374]

John Healey: I regret that this information is not available. The Government is committed to ensuring that everyone who is entitled to this relief receives what is due to them. Where the relief is not claimed but is subsequently discovered to have been due, the Inland Revenue will make a full repayment of any duty paid.

Information Technology

Mr. Caton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the new contractor will be required to ensure that the service remains *(a)* unified, *(b)* accountable and *(c)* within the United Kingdom under the Inland Revenue's tendering process for IT services. [79457]

Dawn Primarolo: The service will be unified and will be let as a single contract covering all existing and future IT needs of the Inland Revenue. The scope of the contract was set out in an OJEC notice, dated 2 March 2002, which announced the start of the procurement process. The UK Government complies fully with its EU and WTO treaty obligations. It is the intention of the Inland Revenue, through the Invitation to Tender, to specify a unified service which is accountable and within the UK.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many agency agreements HM Customs and Excise have in place with private companies whereby Customs are paid to police intellectual property rights on behalf of the companies in question. [79038]

John Healey: As of 31 October 2002, HM Customs and Excise have a total of 152 agency agreements in place with private companies.

Prostate Cancer Statistics

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many male deaths from prostate cancer there were in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [80046]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 7 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the number of male deaths from prostate cancer since 1997. [80046]

The most recent available mortality data are for the calendar year 2001. Figures for each year from 1997 to 2001 are given in the table below.

Number of deaths from prostate cancer[1], England and Wales, 1997 to 2001[2]

Calendar year	Number of deaths
1997	8,523
1998	8,573
1999	8,533
2000	8,293
2001	8,912

Notes:

[1] The cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) code 185 for the years 1997 to 2000, and for the year 2001, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) code C61.

[2] Figures are for deaths occurring in each calendar year.

[3] The introduction of ICD-10 for coding cause of death in 2001 means that data for prostate cancer in this year are not comparable with data for earlier years. The introduction of ICD-10 has led to an apparent increase of 4 per cent. in the number of deaths coded to prostate cancer. The figures should therefore be interpreted with caution.

The effect of the change in classification in 2001 is described in a report published in May 2002[1]

Student Top-up Fees

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much, in their current ratios, the small companies and mainstream rates of corporation tax would have to rise to yield the current revenues of student top-up fees. [79265]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* Universities do not charge top-up fees. The amounts that can be raised by changing the small companies and mainstream rates of corporation tax are contained in Table 1.6 on Inland Revenue's Website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax—expenditures/g—t06—1.htm

Suicide Statistics

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many suicides of young men aged 15 to 24 years there were in each year from 1979; and if he will make a statement. [80052]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 7 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the number of suicides in young men aged 15 to 24 in each year since 1979. [80052]

The most recent available mortality data are for the calendar year 2001. Figures for each year from 1979 to 2001 are given in the table below.

Number of deaths from suicide and undetermined whether purposely inflicted or not[1] occurring in men aged 15 to 24, England and Wales, 1979 to 2001[2]

Calendar year	Number of deaths in men aged 15–24
1979	355
1980	353
1981	403
1982	365
1983	377
1984	407
1985	460
1986	491
1987	544
1988	618
1989	574
1990	623
1991	572
1992	571
1993	556
1994	530
1995	484
1996	451
1997	502
1998	461
1999	436
2000	398
2001	434

Notes:

[1] The cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes E950–E959 and E980-E989 excluding E988.8 for the years 1979 to 2000, and, for the year 2001, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes X60–X84 and Y10–Y34 excluding where the verdict was pending.

[2] Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year from 1979 to 1992 and for deaths occurring in each calendar year from 1993 to 2001.

[3] The introduction of ICD-10 for coding cause of death in 2001 means that data for suicide and undetermined whether purposely inflicted or not in this year are not comparable with data for earlier years. The introduction of ICD-10 has led to an apparent increase of 1 per cent. in the number of deaths coded to undetermined whether purposely inflicted or not. The figures should therefore be interpreted with caution. The effect of the change in classification in 2001 is described in a report published in May 2002.[1]

[1] Office for National Statistics. Results of the ICD-10 bridge coding study, England and Wales, 1999. *Health Statistics Quarterly* 14 (2002), 75–83.

IT Skills

Ross Cranston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations his Department has received from *(a)* right hon. and hon. Members, *(b)* trade associations and employers organisations and *(c)* training companies concerning the economic impact of higher level skills shortages in the information technology sector. [79835]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor of the Exchequer receives a large number of representations from trade and employers organisations, firms and members of the House of Commons in relation to a wide variety of different areas of Government policy.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the financial assistance to, and tax treatment of, individuals in employment who choose to meet the costs of their own training in higher levels skills in the information technology sector. [79836]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keep all taxes under review as part of the normal Budget process. The financial assistance available to adult learners is being reviewed in the context of the development of the Government's Skills Strategy, which will be published next year.

Energy Efficiency

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy further to promote energy efficiency in *(a)* new buildings and *(b)* existing buildings. [78468]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have a range of policies for promoting energy efficiency of both existing and new buildings. Details of current and proposed fiscal policies are set out in the Budget 2002 report. In Budget 2002 the Government announced that it would consider ways in which economic instruments might be used to improve household energy efficiency. The Treasury and DEFRA published a joint consultation document, "Economic Instruments To Improve Household Energy Efficiency", in July 2002. The consultation period ended on 8 October 2002. The Government is currently considering the responses to that consultation.

The Climate Change Levy introduced in April 2001 provides an incentive to all businesses and the public sector to improve their energy efficiency in all areas including their building stock.

The Government's Climate Change Programme sets out our other measures to improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors of the economy.

NIRS2

Mr Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the value was of duplicate National Insurance payments made into personal pension plans triggered by the NIRS2 computer system; and if he will make a statement; [79951]

(2) what the value was of duplicate National Insurance payments that were recovered from personal pension plans that were triggered by the NIRS2 computer system. [79953]

Dawn Primarolo: The value of payments affected is £61.95m. The vast majority of this has been recovered from the pension schemes affected.

Mr Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many personal pension plans received duplicate National Insurance payments triggered by the NIRS2 computer system; [79952]

(2) how many personal pension plans were recovered from which duplicate National Insurance payments triggered by the NIRS2 computer system; and what action his Department took to inform *(a)* individuals and *(b)* the managers of personal pension plans that duplicate National Insurance payments triggered by the NIRS2 computer system would be recovered. [79954]

Dawn Primarolo: Up to 1255 pension schemes were affected and we have recovered any amount overpaid from the vast majority of these. We have worked very closely with the pension industry's representative bodies and with the individual pension schemes affected to keep them informed and to consider how they should best deal with their individual members.

Research and Development Tax Credit

Mr Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 24 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 429W, on small firms, what assessment he has made of the impact of the research and development tax credit for small firms. [80310]

Dawn Primarolo: Both the research and development (R&D) tax credit for small or medium companies (SMEs) and the new R&D tax credit for large companies, introduced this year, are measures for the long term. At present we only have figures for the first year of the SME credit. However, in that first year, the response from small companies was good and all the signs are that interest is growing.

Tobacco Imports

Mr Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice he took from health experts before deciding to change the personal allowance for tobacco imports. [80008]

John Healey: Within the European Union there are no personal allowances for tobacco imports. Since the creation of the Single Market in 1993 travellers have been able to bring back as much EU duty paid tobacco and alcohol as they wish as long as it is for their own use. The recent changes to indicative levels simply act as a guide to assist shoppers and make it easier for Customs officers to distinguish between the honest shopper and the illegal smuggler.

The new package of measures against tobacco smuggling, which I announced on 29 October, is designed to continue the successful crackdown on the illicit supply of cigarettes. It is this illegal supply of cheap, unregulated cigarettes which presents the principal threat to keeping the effective price of smoking high in support of the Government's health objectives.

For details of these measures I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire on 29 October, *Official Report*, column 686w.

Office Rents

Mr Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much rent was paid by *(a)* Inland Revenue and *(b)* Customs for their offices in the last nine months of 2001; to which companies; and if he will give the equivalent information for (i) the first six months of 2002 and (ii) a forecast of the total for the next 10 years. [80220]

Dawn Primarolo: The majority of the Departments' accommodation is now occupied as serviced accommodation under a number of PFI/PPP contracts. Under some of these contracts the Departments pay a unitary charge in return for serviced accommodation which includes the accommodation, related facilities management and maintenance. The unitary charge does not include any separately identifiable amount in respect of rent. The main such contract is the STEPS contract with Mapeley.

The Departments have paid the following unitary charges to Mapeley Steps Contractor Ltd:

	Inland Revenue		*HM Customs & Excise*	
	Last 9 months of 2001	*First 6 months of 2002*	*Last 9 months of 2001*	*First 6 months of 2002*
Payment (plus VAT)	£99,375,490	£67,512,708	£35,541,277	£24,000,123

It has not proved possible to obtain corresponding information for the other PFI/PPP contracts in the time available. I will write to the HM with this information and put a copy of my letter in the House Library.

In addition both Departments occupy certain property outside the PFI/PPP contracts where rent is payable to a number of landlords. For example the Customs & Excise posts at ports and airports. The information on the rent payable on these properties could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Annuities

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Inland Revenue regulations, as they relate to annuities, preclude an annuitant to transfer from one provider to another; and what plans he has to change the regulations. [79968]

Ruth Kelly: The tax rules do not prohibit the transfer of liability to pay an annuity to a different provider so long as the terms of the annuity are not altered. It is a matter of contract between the parties whether this can occur at the request of the annuitant.

As indicated in the reply given on 18 July 2002 to the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Granger), *Official Report*, column 467W, the Government plans to bring forward powers to make it possible to offer people buying annuities more choice and flexibility. Any reforms to annuities will need to dovetail with simplification and other reforms being considered in the pensions Green Paper this autumn.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what public consultations have been commenced by his Department in each month since 20 July; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80275]

John Healey: A full list of recent public consultations including start date, closing date and a link to the relevant document can be found by following the consultations link on the Treasury web site at: www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Euro

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list Government statements and publications that demonstrate how adoption by the United Kingdom of the euro would alter its power to manage the economy. [80211]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. The assessment will be comprehensive and rigorous. Once the assessment is complete, it will be published and will be subject to intensive public scrutiny and debate.

Company Auditors

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make a statement on his plans to implement Commission Recommendation 2002/590/EC on Statutory Auditors' Independence. [78127]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply

Recommendation 2002/590/EC was adopted by the European Commission on 16 May 2002.

The UK requirements on the independence of statutory company auditors and in the Companies Act 1989 to supervise statutory company auditors and in auditing standards set by the Auditing Practices Board. These bodies are preparing the changes needed to ensure that their requirements are in line with the Recommendation. No changes are needed to auditing standards to bring our requirements into line with the Recommendation.

The Recommendation also suggests the disclosure of fees paid by major companies to their auditors in respect of audit services and non-audit services, broken down into major categories. The UK already requires large companies to disclose in their accounts the fees paid to their auditors in respect of audit and non-audit services. We will consult on changes to the existing regulations to require a breakdown of the non-audit services provided by the auditors

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to him from honourable Members in this session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one

month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [79947]

John Healey: One Parliamentary question for answer in July, which was transferred to the Treasury in September, has not been answered.

The information relating to letters from Members to Treasury Ministers is as follows:

	Amount
(i) one month	54
(ii) two months	37
(ii) three months	19
(iv) four months	7
(v) over six months	0

The Cabinet Office publishes a report ot Parliament annually setting out the volume of Members' correspondence received by departments. The report for 2001 was published on 24 May 2002 *Official Report*, column 674W. Reports for earlier years are available in the Library of the House.

British Museum

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations his Department received prior to the announcement of the revenue increase for the British Museum. [78838]

Mr. Boateng: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Share Indices

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the impact of Treasury policy on the performance of *(a)* the FTSE 100 and *(b)* the all share index with particular reference to international competitiveness. [79109]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor of the Exchequer and other Treasury Ministers receive numerous representations concerning the impact of Treasury policy on FTSE 100 companies, the all share index and the competitiveness of UK industry and the City of London. These are taken into consideration in the development of Government policy in these important areas.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the discount rate of 6 per cent. For HMG PFI projects was calculated. [65533]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what funding has been authorised in each financial year since May 1997 for raising capital via the Private Finance Initiative, broken down by Department; and what limits on sums authorised were imposed under European Community law, identifying the relevant EU instruction in each case. [79833]

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rate of interest the Government pay in the PFI schemes. [78418]

Mr. Boateng: I will write to the hon. Members and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Spinning (Investment Banks)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Financial Services Authority regarding the alleged practice of spinning by investment banks; and if he will make a statement. [79096]

Ruth Kelly: This is a matter for the Financial Services Authority. I understand the FSA has begun an informal inquiry into spinning and has requested information on what processes UK regulated firms have in place to prevent spinning, while seeking views on a possible rule change which would explicitly outlaw certain types of conduct.

Tax Havens

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether account is taken in PFI and PPP contracts of whether bidders are based in tax havens; and what assessment is made in awarding such contracts of the competitive advantage given to such companies; [80216]

(2) if he will ban companies based in tax havens from participation in Government contracts. [80215]

Mr. Boateng: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

LORD CHANCELLOR

Court Accommodation (Northern Ireland)

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether she is yet in a position to announce their proposals relating to court accommodation in Northern Ireland. [80108]

Ms Rosie Winterton: After full consideration of all the information gathered during the public consultation exercise which followed the issue of the consultation document "Court Accommodation in Northern Ireland 2001–2010", I have decided that the courthouses at Clogher and Cookstown will close at the end of this year and business will be transferred to the new courthouse at Dungannon. Business currently dealt with in rented accommodation in Kilkeel will transfer to Newry courthouse.

The courthouses at Banbridge and Larne will remain as court venues as will Limavady courthouse. Hearings at Limavady courthouse will be restricted to magistrates courts adult criminal business. The future of Limavady courthouse will be reviewed in light of business trends and with particular regard to the outcome of the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland and any changes this necessitates in court divisional boundaries.

The Court Service will conduct a feasibility study in the North Down area on the possibility of replacing the existing courthouses at Bangor and Newtownards. Consideration will also be given to upgrading or replacing the courthouse at Lisburn.

Damages

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary Lord Chancellor's Department how the Lord Chancellor intends to take forward proposals which she consulted on in her consultation paper, "Damages for Future Loss: Giving Courts the Power to Order Periodical Payments for Future Loss and Care Costs", published on 13 March. [80109]

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor has today published the post-consultation report to the consultation paper "Damages for Future Loss". Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. A majority of respondents agreed with the Government's proposal that courts should have the power to award damages for future loss and care costs in the form of periodical payments. The Government intend to legislate when a suitable opportunity arises.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary Lord Chancellor's Department what public consultations have been commenced by her Department in each month since 20 July; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80272]

Yvette Cooper: It is not possible to answer the question before prorogation and I will write with the answer and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Better Public Buildings Initiative

Ms Shipley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary Lord Chancellor's Department if she will name the projects the departmental design champion has sponsored as part of the Better Public Buildings Initiative; and if she will make a statement on the extent of her personal input in respect of each. [80338]

Yvette Cooper: It is not possible to answer the question before prorogation and I will write with the answer and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what strategies her Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79292]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department is committed to equality of opportunity, a key feature of all civil service employment: ageism is not tolerated. Retirement age is determined on business needs only (currently 60, 62 or 65 depending on grade).

Recruitment, development, performance management and retention policies are reviewed continuously.

Child Abduction

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases of prevention of access to children of British Nationals living in Germany have been reported to the Child Abduction Unit in the last five years. [79518]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Any parent resident in England and Wales may apply to the Child Abduction Unit (CAU) for access (contact) to their child living in a contracting state. The CAU does not keep statistics on whether cases involve British Nationals. The table shows combined figures for applications to Germany from England and Wales in the last five years for access (under Article 21 of the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction); and applications seeking registration of existing contact orders (under the 1980 Luxembourg (Council of Europe) Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on the Restoration of the Custody of Children).

Access (contact) cases from applicants within England and Wales pursued in Germany

		Case Outcomes			
Year	*Total cases*	*Ordered*	*Refused*	*Withdrawn*	*Pending*
1997	10	4	3	3	0
1998	6	4	1	1	0
1999	7	3	1	3	0
2000	4	2	0	2	0
2001	3	1	0	0	2

Lay Justices

Dr. Francis: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the national strategy on the recruitment of lay justices to achieve benches that reflect the community they serve will be published. [78690]

Yvette Cooper: As of 1 April 2002 there were 28,479 active magistrates in England and Wales. A great deal of work has been carried out over the last few years to improve the balance of the lay bench. The latest available figures show 50.91 per cent. male and 49.09 per cent. female magistrates, 8.29 per cent. of whom are from ethnic minority groups. In the next few months, my noble and learned friend the Lord Chancellor, will publish a national recruitment strategy, the core aims of which are to develop a structured campaign to raise the profile of the magistracy and encourage applicants from as wide a cross-section of the community as possible.

Local Management Boards

Dr. Francis: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what role is envisaged for magistrates in the proposed local management boards; which agencies will sit on such boards; and who will ensure that objectives are *(a)* set and *(b)* met. [78691]

Yvette Cooper: It is the Government's stated intention to bring together the administration of all courts in England and Wales, below the House of Lords, into a new executive agency. We intend to set up local boards to enable representatives of users and the wider community to be involved in the decision making process about the administration of courts in their area. The precise membership of the boards is yet to be determined, although we envisage that the magistracy will be represented. The setting of the objectives for the new organisation as a whole and the assessment of performance will be a matter for the Lord Chancellor. The local boards will be involved in ensuring that the objectives are met.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Caton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary Lord Chancellor's Department when will the next annual report of the chief inspector, Magistrates Courts Service Inspectorate, be published. [80387]

Yvette Cooper: I have today placed copies of the chief inspector's annual report in the Library of both Houses.

For the first time the annual report includes the inspectorate's new responsibility for the inspection of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS). In March 2002 the inspectorate published a progress report on its work with CAFCASS ("Setting Up") which highlighted some of the difficulties the new body had faced during its first year in existence. In his latest report, the chief inspector points to encouraging signs of progress, such as the publication of CAFCASS's first corporate plan and their work on developing draft national standards.

Magistrates Courts Committees (MCCs) are seen to have contributed significantly to achieving the Government's target to reduce delay in the processing of persistent young offenders. The chief inspector reports that MCCs have also handled well the transfer of warrant execution from the police to the courts. This was a major piece of work and for understandable reasons there was some slippage in performance. Some criticisms remain of MCCs ability to ensure systems are in place to manage performance at a strategic level.

Rape Cases

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) which of the *(a)* High Court and *(b)* Crown Court judges who hear rape trials are criminal law specialists; and of those who are not, by what means they have been selected as experienced to try rape cases; [80250]

(2) pursuant to the Answer of 24 July, *Official Report*, column 1282W, on rape trials, what efforts are made by the Lord Chancellor to ensure that only those judges with appropriate experience and sensitivity at *(a)* High Court and *(b)* Crown Court level hear rape cases; how the experience and sensitivity of judges at each level are ascertained; what record is retained of how judges are selected according to these criteria; and how often the record is updated with regard to their trial performance. [80249]

Yvette Cooper: It is not possible to answer the question before prorogation and I will write with the answer and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what training for trying cases of rape and sexual assault is given to High Court Judges (a) on appointment and (b) at a later date; and whether, in each case, this training is compulsory; [80246]

(2) what training High Court Judges undergo on appointment; and whether this training is compulsory. [80247]

Yvette Cooper: It is not possible to answer the question before prorogation. I will write with the answer and a copy of the letter will be placed in the library.

Contact Orders

Ms Debra Shipley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, the Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to her Answer of 11 July (Official Report, column 1200W) on contact orders, what amendments are proposed to court rules to ensure consistency in the treatment of applications for contact where there are allegations of violence. [79719]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We have set up a Safety Working Group (including, amongst others, representatives from children's and women's organisations) to assist in consideration of what practical measures, including possible amendments to court rules and forms, are required to ensure consistency in how courts deal with applications for contact where there are allegations of domestic violence. We hope to have proposals from the Working Group in mid-December.

Columbus House, Newport

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the Home

Office leased building at Columbus House on the Langstone Business Park in Newport, South Wales; and if it will be used for residential purposes. [79704]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply. The Home Office has not leased the building Columbus House, Langstone Business Park, Newport. It has been leased by the Court Service for use by the Immigration Appellate Authority as an immigration hearing centre.

The centre has no residential facilities and appellants will attend, on a daily basis, only in connection with oral appeal hearings.

Recruitment (Over-50s)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of new recruits to her Department in the past two years were aged 50 and over. [79307]

Ms Rosie Winterton: 23.7 per cent. of staff recruited in the two year period between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2002 were over the age of 50.

Broken down into the two separate years the percentages are:

	Percentage
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	14.8
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	29.3

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Overcrowding

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce overcrowding of prisons. [74927]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of prison overcrowding on the treatment of remand prisoners. [76628]

Hilary Benn: As of 30 September 2002, the total prison population was 72,315. Of these 7,963 were on remand, and a further 5,227 were remanded awaiting sentence.

It is obvious that such a high level of prison population will affect both convicted and unconvicted prisoners alike. The Prison Service closely monitors the effects of overcrowding and the conditions in which all prisoners are held are of equal concern.

Asylum Seekers (Private Contractors)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the private contractors providing accommodation and support for asylum seekers that have been dropped since 1997 because of dissatisfaction with their performance. [78582]

Beverley Hughes: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) became operational on 3 April 2000. Since that date NASS has not terminated any contracts with private sector contractors providing accommodation or support for asylum seekers.

Information Technology

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of how the additional funds dedicated to information technology to promote closer working and streamline case management across the criminal justice system departments will *(a)* increase efficiency and *(b)* improve the system of measuring outcomes. [78686]

Mr. Wills: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Animal Experimentation

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding has been allocated each year since 1997 to develop alternative tests to replace animal experimentation; to which Departments it has been allocated; and what plans there are to increase future funding. [79749]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The United Kingdom Government, across various Government Departments, spends in the region of £2 million each year and at an international level, we will continue to support the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM) through contributions to the European Union. However, most work on the search for and development of alternatives to using animals in scientific procedures is neither done by Government nor with Government money—it is conducted and funded by the research industry itself, which spends many millions of pounds on it each year.

Every year the Home Office makes available to the Animal Procedures Committee a budget for research aimed at developing or promoting the use of alternatives which replace animal use, reduce the number of animals used, or refine the procedures involved to minimise suffering (the 'Three Rs'). Details of annual budgets and completed research projects are published in the annual report of the Animal Procedures Committee, which is available from the Stationery Office. The amount made available to the Committee each year since 1997 was:

	£
1997–98	182,000
1998–99	259,000
1999–2000	259,000
2000–01	265,500
2001–02	280,000
2002–03	280,000

The use of alternatives is widely encouraged, and the use of animals in regulated procedures is prohibited by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in cases where a scientifically valid non-animal alternative is available. Any lack of progress in research into alternatives is more often due to the limitations of science rather than inadequate funding. However, this will be considered further in the context of the

recommendation of the House of Lords Select Committee on Animals in Scientific Procedures that a Centre for the 3Rs should be set up. The Government are considering their response to the Select Committee's report.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his Answer of 16 October, *Official Report*, column 872W, on NHS staff, which countries will be included in the Criminal Records Bureau's advisory service to employers about the availability of criminal records checks; and which countries perform a reciprocal service. [78374]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects the Criminal Records Bureau to have completed its backlog of checks on *(a)* teachers and *(b)* classroom assistants in England and Wales; [74348]

(2) how many outstanding Criminal Records Bureau checks there are on *(a)* teachers and *(b)* classroom assistants in England and Wales. [74350]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it is taking on average for checks on care workers to be completed by the Criminal Records Bureau at the latest available date. [77087]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many care home staff who would have required Criminal Record Bureau checks for existing staff before 1 April have had checks postponed until *(a)* 31 March 2003 and *(b)* 2004. [79813]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research was undertaken by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Capita to determine the *(i)* likely level of demand for Criminal Records Bureau checks and (ii) Criminal Records Bureau customers' preferred means of submitting applications for checks. [80024]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will publish guidance to registered bodies about the postponement of Criminal Records Bureau checks as set out in the announcement made on 1 November. [80026]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for criminal record checks have been made using the Criminal Records Bureau's telephone checking service; and what proportion this constitutes of the total number of record check applications. [77982]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* teaching and *(b)* non-teaching staff have been subject to Criminal Records Bureau vetting; and *(i)* how many and (ii) what percentage of each category failed. [74310]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* appeals and *(b)* overturned Criminal Records Bureau checks for each local authority for *(i)* social workers and (ii) voluntary organisations who work with children there were in each of the last 12 months; [74542]

(2) how many applications *(a)* were processed by and *(b)* were outstanding with the Criminal Records Bureau for each local authority for *(i)* social workers and (ii) voluntary organisations who work with children for each of the last 12 months. [74544]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the final report by Patrick Carter into the Criminal Records Bureau. [80035]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* value of contract and *(b)* evaluation mechanism for successful delivery of contract are in the running of the CRB by Capita; and whether penalty charges are in place. [80057]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many outstanding Criminal Records Bureau checks there were on childminder applicants in England and Wales on 23 September. [74347]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* nurses supplied by nurses agencies and *(b)* staff supplied by domiciliary care agencies will no longer have to have Criminal Record Bureau checks. [79808]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what compensation his Department will offer to *(a)* staff, *(b)* private care homes, *(c)* voluntary organisations and *(d)* local authorities for the delays in Criminal Record Bureau checks; and if he will make a statement. [75570]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Paul Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his Answer of 16 October, *Official Report*, column 868W, on Criminal Records Bureau checks, how many checks on *(a)* social workers, *(b)* other social care staff and *(c)* voluntary health organisations working with children have been outstanding for *(i)* one month, (ii) two months, (iii) three months and (iv) longer than six months. [78373]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* teaching and *(b)* non-teaching staff who had received Criminal Records Bureau clearance prior to the start of the school term were subsequently checked and found to be unfit for work with children. [74306]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copyof my letter in the Library.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those subjected to checks by the Criminal Records Bureau as a result of their employment in schools have contested the factual basis of information disclosed about them as a result of such checks; what steps need to be taken by a person who contests such information; and what action he proposes to take in respect of cases where the information disclosed about individuals is found to be incorrect. [74453]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it has taken on average for checks on care workers to be completed by the Criminal Records Bureau in the last six months. [77759]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will estimate how many persons caring for *(a)* children and *(b)* vulnerable adults will now not have Criminal Records Bureau checks; [80023]

(2) what the *(a)* planned time and *(b)* actual time taken was for each stage in commissioning the Criminal Records Bureau; [80025]

(3) how many existing staff requiring Criminal Records Bureau checks will have the check postponed from March 2003 to 2004; [80033]

(4) how many Criminal Records Bureau checks have been delayed for *(a)* teachers and *(b)* classroom assistants in each of the last six months by *(i)* one, (ii) two, (iii) three, and (iv) six months or more. [80039]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it took on average over the last period for which figures are available to carry out Criminal Records Bureau checks on taxi drivers. [80318]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Prison-building Programme

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's proposed spending plans on new prison building in 2003–04. [78627]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he will take to ensure that the contractors in the expanded prison building programme comply with Government requirements regarding the use of timber from legal and sustainable sources; and if he will make a statement. [77672]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Racial Equality (Sikhs)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will have in place means to monitor Sikhs separately with respect to *(a)* employment and *(b)* the provision of public services. [80370]

Beverley Hughes: We have no plans to do this,

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will amend the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality so that it requires public authorities to monitor Sikhs separately. [78213]

Beverley Hughes: Some Sikh organisations have argued that Sikhs should be monitored as a separate ethnic group rather than subsumed in one of the generic monitoring categories used in the 2001 census. The fact that case law has established Sikhs as an ethnic group for the purposes of the Race Relations Act does not, of itself, justify different treatment from the many other ethnic and racial groups in the United Kingdom. Therefore, we do not intend to amend the statutory Code of Practice.

The statutory Code of Practice is not prescriptive about the form of ethnic monitoring. Rather it encourages authorities to use the same ethnic classification system as used in the 2001 census, or categories that match them very closely. However the statutory Code also recognises that authorities may choose to collect more detailed information to reflect local circumstances. Public authorities with significant Sikh populations in their area may opt to do this. Helpfully, demographic information about British Sikhs will be available for the first time from the results of the religious identity question in the 2001 census due to be published next February.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many public authorities are monitoring Sikhs as a separate ethnic group following the issue of the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality. [80372]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Sentencing

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on consistency of approach to sentencing; [78689]

(2)when he will implement the provisions in the Crime Sentences Act 1997 regarding *(a)* the imposition of curfew orders, *(b)* community punishment orders and *(c)* driving disqualifications for fine defaulters. [78682]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Sentencing Powers

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which magistrates' powers will be increased to allow their sentencing powers to be raised *(a)* to 12 months and *(b)* subsequently to 18 months as indicated in the White Paper, Justice for All. [78687]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Terrorism

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what research he has taken into the threat to departmental computer systems from e-terrorist attack; [78977]

(2) what assessment he has made of the threat to e-government from e-terrorist attack. [78976]

(3) what assessments she has made of the threat to UK business from e-terrorist attack. [78975]

Mr. Blunkett: The threat from terrorists to the Critical National Infrastructure (CNI), in Government and the private sector, is growing but unpredictable. While there is always the possibility of a low level attack (eg, website defacements or narrowly targeted denial of service attacks) we think the current likelihood of a successful major damaging attack against United Kingdom interests is low. However, we keep the situation under constant review, a task which lies with the National Infrastructure Security Co-ordination Centre (NISCC) (see www.niscc.gov.uk). Although focused on CNI institutions, other systems administrators may like to look at the advice and information available through the NISCC website, and also at the linked Unified Incident Reporting and Alert Scheme, www.uniras.gov.uk which contains information on best practice, new vulnerabilities and mitigating actions. www.dti.gov.uk also contains useful information on information security.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what request for assistance he has received from the FBI concerning the links of a UK Moslem cleric with James Ujaama, currently under arrest and indicted in Portland, Oregon concerning an alleged terrorist training camp. [79526]

Mr. Blunkett: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Ageism

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what strategies his Department has to ensure that there is no ageism in recruitment and retention processes. [79287]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office has made a commitment to provide staff of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to maximise their skills and achieve their potential. This is incorporated into our employment policy on discrimination and is set out in equal opportunities statement which was revised and updated in March 2002.

The Department continues to monitor recruitment, selection and appraisal statistics to ensure that neither age discrimination nor any other form of discrimination is taking place.

Following a comprehensive review of the Department's age retirement policy, all Home Office staff below the Senior Civil Service now have the option to retire at any point between the ages of 60 and 65.

This move was reflected in the Department's recruitment policy. The Home Office will consider job applications from people up to age 64, subject to their meeting normal standards of health. Provided that there is an expectation of a reasonable period of employment and a return on the investment in recruitment and training, the primary criterion for selection will be the ability of the candidate to carry out the duties of the vacant post. In making these various changes, the Home Office is implementing the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit report "Winning the Generation Game".

Separate arrangements apply to Her Majesty's Prison Service who have conducted their own review to tackle age discrimination.

Air Support (Surrey Police)

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will grant the application by Surrey police authority for funding to assist with the purchase of a new EC135 helicopter for use in policing in the county. [79911]

Mr. Denham: Surrey police authority has submitted an application for funding to assist in the purchase of a new police role-equipped helicopter. This application has been made under the guidelines for the allocation of Home Office capital funding for police air support (2003–04).

A number of police forces have submitted applications for funding in 2003–04 for air support purposes and a decision on the allocation of the available funding will be announced in the new year.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been made in each local authority area in England since May 1997; how many of these orders have been broken by the offender; and what average prison term has resulted from such breaches of ASBOs. [56239]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders and acceptable behaviour contracts have been issued, broken down by police authority area in England and Wales. [76257]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been issued in *(a)* Hampshire and *(b)* Portsmouth South in the last six months; and if he will make a statement. [76502]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many anti-social behaviour orders have been issued since their introduction, broken down by local authority area; and if he will make a statement. [79592]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Area-based Initiatives

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will list for each area-based initiative for which his Department is responsible the amount originally budgeted for in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, stating in each year what funds budgeted for were not spent and if they were carried forward. [71459]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Arrests (Portsmouth, South)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been arrested in the Portsmouth, South constituency in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [78964]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of arrests for notifiable offences is collected centrally at police force area level only. Available information shows that in 1999–2000 there were 42,598 arrests for notifiable offences within the Hampshire police force area and in 2000–01 (latest available) 39,420. Information for earlier years is not available on a consistent basis. Figures for 2001–02 will be available in due course.

Asylum Appeals

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants under the expedited appeals process *(a)* between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002 and *(b)* since 1 April 2002 received *(i)* legal advice and assistance in preparing their asylum appeal and (ii) legal representation at the appeal hearing; [79615]

(2) how many asylum appeals *(a)* between 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 and *(b)* since 1 April 2002 have been *(i)* lodged and (ii) heard under the expedited appeals process; how many of these appeals have been refused; and in relation to these refusals, how many applications for judicial review have been lodged. [79616]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* The expedited appeal process commenced in August 2002.

Appeals are expedited where the appellant's claim has been processed at Oakington, they remain detained after leaving Oakington, and the appeal has been certified as falling within paragraph 9(4)*(a)* or *(b)* or paragraph 9(5)*(a)* or *(b)* of schedule 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (appeals which are manifestly unfounded).

Appeals in the expedited process have no first hearing and are listed for a full hearing no earlier than six and no later than eight working days from receipt of the appeal by the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA).

Advice and assistance for preparing an asylum appeal is available to all asylum applicants at Oakington. The Immigration Advisory Service and Refugee Legal Centre both have on-site representatives and will act for any asylum applicants held at Oakington. Subject to means and merits tests, applicants will be entitled to receive legal representation funded by the Legal Services Commission at their appeal hearing.

Asylum statistics are published quarterly. The latest published figures give information up to and including June 2002. Data relating to the period beyond June 2002 are not yet available. The next publication giving figures up to and including September will be available from 29 November 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Asylum Reception Policies

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the results of his research to examine asylum reception policies and practice of Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany; and if he will make a statement. [75401]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Asylum Seekers

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research he has commissioned on the factors which are attracting asylum seekers and illegal immigrants to Britain. [78585]

Beverley Hughes: Research examining the decision making of asylum seekers and the reasons why they seek asylum in the UK in preference to other countries has already been conducted. This was based on interviews with a small sample of asylum seekers and refugees. Because the sample size was relatively small, the

conclusion that can be drawn from the research must be interpreted with caution. The report of the findings was published by the Home Office in July 2002 ('Understanding the Decision Making of Asylum Seekers' by Vaughan Robinson and Jeremy Segrott Home Office Research Study number 243 / Home Office Findings number 172).

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has commissioned research to survey a small sample of people in detention centres who have been illegally resident in the UK (some of whom may not have entered illegally but have become illegal since entering the UK). My right hon. Friend is considering commissioning a study of a small sample of overstayers. Again, the relatively small sample size means that any results would need to be interpreted with caution. Both research studies take the form of in-depth interviews with these people, and the findings are expected to include some information about the factors that attracted them to the UK.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on asylum towards those seeking refuge from slavery in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [79339]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* Applications for asylum in the United Kingdom are considered individually on their merits in accordance with the UK's obligations under the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. Unless the Dublin Convention applies or the applicant may reasonably be expected on other grounds to seek asylum in a third country, asylum is granted where the applicant fulfils the criteria of the 1951 UN Convention.

Slavery can constitute persecution. Where the application is based upon slavery we will assess whether that slavery relates to one of the Convention grounds, whether the state authorities are willing or able to offer effective protection against it, and whether the applicant could reasonably be expected to move to another part of the country where he or she would be safe.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to employ independent consultants to assess the effectiveness of asylum accommodation centres that are opened as part of the initial trial of such centres. [79480]

Beverley Hughes: The evaluation will be led by the Immigration, Research and Statistics Service—part of the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate. It will include a combination of management information, consultation with relevant people and more formal research carried out by independent researchers under contract to the Home Office. The results of the accommodation centres evaluation will be publicly available and made available to Parliament.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to invite contractors to tender for the construction and operation of the trial asylum accommodation centres. [79482]

Beverley Hughes: Tender documents for each for the trial accommodation centre sites will not be issued until planning consent has been obtained.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had about the provision of *(a)* a floating asylum accommodation centre with possible suppliers of such facilities and *(b)* core and cluster asylum accommodation centres with the Refugee Council; and if he will make a statement. [79484]

Beverley Hughes: I met the Refugee Council on 21 October to discuss their proposals. That dialogue will continue. We have not ruled out the possibility of using floating accommodation centres for asylum seekers.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers there are in Blackburn; and how many are resident in *(a)* private accommodation and *(b)* publicly provided accommodation. [79702]

Beverley Hughes: The information is not available in the form requested. We currently only have statistics on the location of asylum seekers supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

As at the end of June 2002 there were 880[1] asylum seekers (including dependants) who were being supported in NASS accommodation in Blackburn. The number of asylum seekers who have been placed by NASS into private or publically owned accommodation is not available.

[1] Figure rounded to the nearest five and excludes cases where support has been ceased.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide new accommodation for asylum seekers in Newport, South Wales. [79705]

Beverley Hughes: Newport is a designated cluster area. As at 30 June 2002 there were 20* asylum seekers including dependants supported in the National Asylum Support Service accommodation in Newport. Within Wales as a whole a further 175* asylum seekers, including dependants, are in receipt of subsistence only support.

* figures rounded to nearest five.

Bail

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to deal with the bailing of prolific offenders especially where there is a history of non-compliance; if he will offer guidance to magistrates in these matters; and if he will make a statement. [77101]

Hilary Benn: The decision on whether to grant bail or remand a defendant in custody is, of course, one for the courts to make, in each case, in line with the statutory framework primarily set out in the Bail Act 1976.

To help the courts to tackle the problems of persistent offending on bail by juveniles, I announced on 16 April 2002 the extension of the existing powers to enable courts to place on secure remand any 12 to 16-year-old where they are of the opinion that the child or young person has a recent history of repeatedly committing imprisonable offences on bail or in local authority accommodation and that it is necessary to remand him into secure accommodation in order to protect the

public from serious harm or to prevent him committing more imprisonable offences. This came into force nationally on 16 September 2002 after implementation on 22 April 2002 in the 10 street crime areas.

In addition to this, the national implementation of electronic tagging for 12 to 16-year-olds on bail and local authority remand was introduced from 1 June 2002. Tagging will strengthen the powers of the courts by increasing their options for dealing with young people who commit repeated imprisonable offences (such as theft and criminal damage) while on bail.

We also intend to include provision, as soon as parliamentary time allows, to weight the court's discretion against granting bail to a defendant who has been charged with an imprisonable offence committed while on bail for another offence. Once this has been introduced we will provide the courts with guidance on the new provision in the usual way.

Brixton Police

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, Official Report, column 56W, on Brixton Police, for what reasons staff were absent during the periods in question. [37513]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Burglar Alarms

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many false burglar alarm call outs there were in each police force in England and Wales, and what the percentage increase or decrease was in each of the last five years. [37430]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is not available centrally.

Burglary

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the clear-up rate by police force was for burglaries in *(a)* urban, *(b)* rural and *(c)* suburban areas in each year since 1979; [78757]

(2) what the average clear-up rate by police force was in each year since 1979. [78756]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* Recorded crime and detection statistics are not recorded by whether the crimes are committed in urban, rural or suburban areas. The requested figures for clear-up (detections) rate by police force area for each year since 1979 are given in the table, which has been placed in the Library.

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which increased the total number of crimes counted in each police force area, and therefore may have affected the detection rate. Detection rates after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

There was also a change in the counting rules for detections on 1 April 1999, the new instructions providing more precise and rigorous criteria for securing a detection, with the underlying emphasis on the successful result of a police investigation. For example, detections obtained by the interview of a convicted prisoner were no longer included. Numbers of detections before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

The adoption of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in April 2002, aimed to move the crime counts for the 43 forces of England and Wales onto a more consistent national basis, and to take a more victim-centred approach to crime recording. A small number of forces adopted the principles of the standard prior to April 2002. As a result both recorded crime and detection rates will have been affected for 2001–02. Had this effect not occurred, it has been estimated that the overall detection rate in England and Wales in 2001–02 would have been 24 per cent., the same as the previous year.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many burglaries with entry per 10,000 households in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 took place in *(i)* urban and (ii) rural areas of England and Wales; and if he will break them down by region. [78856]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* Recorded crime statistics are not recorded by whether the crimes are committed in urban, rural or suburban areas. However, the British Crime Survey (BCS), indicates the percentage of households victims of burglary with entry (once or more) by area type for interviews conducted in the 2001–02 financial year. The BCS estimates that 1.2 per cent. of households in rural areas were victims of burglary with entry (once or more) compared to 2.1 per cent. of those in urban areas.

The latest British Crime Survey produced for the first time, for BCS interviews conducted in 2001–02 estimates of burglary with entry per 10,000 households, and attempted burglary per 10,000 households, by region. Figures were not recorded on this basis before this, and the figures for 2002–03 are not yet available. Regional figures are only given for the BCS due to the variability of specific offence figures at police force level. The figures for 2001–02 BCS interviews are given in the table.

Burglaries recorded by the BCS, by region 2001–02[1]

Rates

Region	*BCS Figures*[2] *Burglary with entry per 10,000 households*	*Attempted burglary per 10,000 households*
North East Region	454	167
North West Region	310	280
Yorkshire and the Humber Region	364	221
East Midlands Region	198	198
West Midlands Region	188	279
East of England Region	188	111
London Region[3]	308	204
South East Region	149	143
South West Region	239	156
Wales	159	76
England and Wales	252	190
England and Wales[4]	243	188

[1] Household data have been revised since publication on 12 July 2002.

[2] Regional figures only are given for the BCS due to the variability of specific offence figures at police force area level.
[3] The BCS does not identify City of London and Metropolitan areas within the London Region.
[4] Excluding London Region.

Care Home Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated waiting times were in each of the last six months for *(a)* new care home staff, *(b)* registered care home providers, *(c)* managers of care homes, *(d)* foster carers and *(e)* adoptive parents who apply for a Criminal Records Bureau check. [80031]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Category D Prisoners

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Category D prisoners have been transferred from an open to a closed prison for breaching prison regulations in each year since 1997. [77396]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not routinely collected.

Commission for Racial Equality

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with *(a)* Ms Beverley Bernard and *(b)* Mr. Trevor Phillips about the chairmanship of the CRE. [78864]

Mr. Blunkett: The Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) is a public appointment governed by the Nolan rules. Ministerial involvement in the process is limited to making the final appointment from a shortlist of candidates drawn up independently by an advisory panel which includes an independent assessor.

Police Service (Civilian Staff)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the policy of the Government is in relation to the police service employing civilian staff with *(a)* spent and *(b)* unspent convictions. [79617]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Columbus House

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the Home Office leased building at Columbus House on the Langstone Business Park in Newport, South Wales; and if it will be used for residential purposes. [79704]

Mr. Blunkett: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Community Court Orders

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many community court orders were not allocated to probation officers in England and Wales in the last 12 months. [79628]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Community Orders

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been imprisoned following breach proceedings in respect of criminal community orders *(a)* during 2001–02 and *(b)* during the first quarter of the current financial year. [79692]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many computers were replaced in his Department, including those used by regional staff outside the central departmental offices in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60754]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Constabulary (Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police officers have left Sussex constabulary in the last 12 months because of *(a)* retirement, *(b)* early retirement, *(c)* injury and *(d)* other employment; [75555]

(2) how many anti-social behaviour orders have been issued in West Sussex in the last six months. [75556]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Cookham Ward Secure Training Centre

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the private finance initiative contract for Cookham Ward (Medway) Secure Training Centre by comparison with a non-private finance initiative alternative. [49654]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Corporate Killing

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the introduction of an offence of corporate killing. [78898]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Corporate Manslaughter

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce an offence of corporate manslaughter; and if he will make a statement. [77918]

Hilary Benn: The Government are committed to extending criminal liability for involuntary manslaughter to corporations, and will legislate when parliamentary time allows.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Torbay of 18 June concerning Mr. Elias Massif Bousaleh. [74856]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Member on 7 November. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will send a full response regarding a constituent, Miss Barker; and if he will make a statement on his handling of the correspondence. [72405]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the right hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

CRB and Capita

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the report from Patrick Carter on the strategy and operations of CRB and Capita. [79810]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Crime Reduction (Portsmouth, South)

Mr Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* those schemes which have received funding under the targeted policing initiative, *(b)* the amount received and *(c)* the targets set to reduce crime under the schemes in Portsmouth South; and if he will make a statement. [78962]

Mr. Denham: We did not receive any bids for funding for targeted policing projects in the Portsmouth South area.

Crime Reduction Strategy

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the participation by the London borough of Islington and the police in a crime reduction strategy. [53233]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Crimestoppers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of crimes which have been solved as a direct result of Crimestoppers in the last 12 months. [12014]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Criminal Convictions

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many convictions there were of those prosecuted in magistrates courts in England and Wales, broken down by local authority area since 1997. [79663]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Criminal Justice

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminals have been brought to justice in each of the last 20 years; and if he will make a statement. [77499]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* Information on offences brought to justice in England and Wales is only available on a consistent basis for the years 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 and is shown in the table.

Notifiable offences and those brought to justice in England and Wales, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Notifiable offences	5,109,116	5,301,171	5,170,196
Offences convicted	755,705	756,629	706,277
Offences cautioned	260,264	249,486	228,814
Offences taken into consideration	105,323	97,640	88,657
Total offences brought to justice	1,121,292	1,103,755	1,023,748

Criminal Justice White Paper

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will propose that any bill arising from the Criminal Justice White Paper is subject to pre-legislative scrutiny on-line. [77783]

Hilary Benn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 30 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 844W.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will publish the responses to his Department on the consultation on the Criminal Justice White Paper, and place them in the Library. [79610]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

CS Spray

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the follow-up studies into the long-term effects on persons sprayed with CS spray have been commissioned; what the specification for these will be; and if the studies will look at susceptible groups including those being treated with neuroleptic drugs. [77691]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The follow-up studies into the longer-term effects on persons sprayed with CS spray commenced in February 2002.

The specification for the study is to evaluate the longer-term medical effects of CS spray, if any, and to produce a report detailing the findings. The study will include susceptible groups and those being treated with neuroleptic medication.

Television Licences (Non-payment)

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people received a custodial sentence in 2001 for non-payment of the BBC licence fee. [80335]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Daniel Bishop

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what form the investigation into the case of Daniel Bishop, who was released in error from Cardiff prison in March, is taking; and if he will make a statement. [79807]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Day Prison Release

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which types of criminal he proposes should be eligible for day release from prison; what sort of work inmates will carry out if they are on day prison release; and what measures will be put in place to ensure that prisoners on day release do not abscond. [35723]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year. [47794]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Departmental Expenditure (Televisions)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* analogue and *(b)* integrated digital television sets his Department has purchased in each of the last 24 months; and if he will make a statement. [38177]

Hilary Benn: The number of *(a)* analogue and *(b)* integrated digital television sets bought by the Home Department in each of the last 24 months are as follows.

Month	*Digital*	*Analogue*
January 2000	0	0
February 2000	0	0
March 2000	0	0
April 2000	2	4
May 2000	0	0
June 2000	0	0
July 2000	4	1
August 2000	1	2
September 2000	0	1
October 2000	0	0
November 2000	0	1
December 2000	1	[1] 12,477
January 2001	1	2
February 2001	0	0
March 2001	0	7
April 2001	0	3
May 2001	0	2
June 2001	0	3
July 2001	0	0
August 2001	1	0
September 2001	1	0
October 2001	0	0
November 2001	0	0
December 2001	0	[1] 12,471
Total	11	24,974

[1] Prison Service end of year totals. Month by month split could not be provided without incurring disproportionate costs.

The high number of television sets purchased by the Prison Service in the years 2000 and 2001 is a result of a programme of providing prison establishments with in cell television sets.

No guidance as been issued relating to the purchasing of television sets.

Departmental Job Vacancies

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many job vacancies there were at *(a)* administrative assistant or equivalent, *(b)* administrative officer or equivalent, *(c)* administrative executive officer, *(d)* higher executive officer, *(e)* senior executive officer, *(f)* grade 7 principal and *(g)* positions above grade 7 level in his Department for jobs located in *(i)* London and *(i)* the South East between 1 April 2001 and 31 March; and what is the total employment for each Civil Service grade. [76562]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* The information requested is not available for all parts of the Department. The tables provide a snapshot of vacancies and staffing at 1 April 2001 and 1 April 2002 for the Home Office and the Prison Service.

Table A: Position as at 1 April 2001 for the Home Office[1]

	London region		*South East region*	
Responsibility level	*Vacancies*[2]	*Total staff*[3]	*Vacancies*	*Total staff*[3]
Grades 6 and above	23	273	—	9
Grade 7	25	442	—	19
Senior Executive Officer	30	621	—	41
Higher Executive Officer	74	1,509	—	158
Executive Officer	47	3,140	—	84
Administrative Officer	55	2,285	—	308
Administrative Assistant	32	1,318	—	73
Other (not included above)	6	—	—	—
Total non-industrial staff	292	9,588	—	1,456

Table B: Position as at 1 April 2002 for the Home Office[1]

	London region		*South East region*	
Responsibility level	*Vacancies*[2]	*Total staff*[3]	*Vacancies*	*Total staff*[3]
Grades 6 and above	18	261	—	4
Grade 7	22	439	—	19
Senior Executive Officer	26	648	—	44
Higher Executive Officer	27	1,562	—	172
Executive Officer	57	3,002	—	793
Administrative Officer	72	2,113	—	304
Administrative Assistant	17	1,321	—	89
Other (not included above)	2	—	—	—
Total non-industrial staff	241	9,346	—	1,425

[1] Includes IND and the Forensic Science Service unless otherwise indicated.

[2] Vacancies shown are only for the central London-based staff, excluding the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and the Forensic Science Service.

[3] Figures include administrative and equivalent grades.

The Immigration and Nationality Directorate cannot provide information on vacancies at 1 April 2001 for 1 April 2002 without incurring disproportionate cost. The Forensic Science Service does not collect information on vacancies filled by internal candidates.

The 241 vacancies shown at 1 April 2002 have been filled through a variety of external recruitment, Job Specific Selection, managed postings, Selection Boards and trawls to other Government Departments.

Table C: Position as at 1 April 2001 for the Prison Service[1]

	London region and HQ		*South East region*	
Responsibility level[2]	*Vacancies*[3]	*Total staff*[4]	*Vacancies*	*Total staff*
Grades 6 and above	6	100	11	37
Grade 7	–1	209	–5	48
Senior Executive Officer	5	235	–7	113
Higher Executive Officer	30	463	10	171
Executive Officer	129	747	20	591
Administrative Officer	106	1,107	12	1,079
Administrative Assistant	433	3,589	36	4,041
Other (not included above)	—	—	—	—
Total non-industrial staff	708	6,450	77	6,080

Table D: Position as at 1 April 2002 for the Prison Service[1]

	London region and HQ		*South East region*	
Responsibility level[2]	*Vacancies*[3]	*Total staff*[4]	*Vacancies*	*Total staff*
Grades 6 and above	6	105	18	38
Grade 7	16	203	39	53
Senior Executive Officer	42	471	–10	274
Higher Executive Officer	–7	237	3	54
Executive Officer	9[illegible]	768	59	617
Administrative Officer	[illegible]	1,040	60	1,185
Administrative Assistant	[illegible]	3,066	265	4,259
Other (not included above)	—	—	—	—
Total non-industrial staff	575	5,890	433	6,480

[1] Excludes staff in area offices and other split site staff.

[2] Prison Officer and Governor grades are included in equivalent administrative grade at appropriate responsibility level; nurses allocated to Executive Officer level because the forecast planned post data do not distinguish their grade level.

[3] Vacancies calculated as total of forecast planned posts minus full-time equivalent staff in post as at 31 March 2001.

[4] Excludes those staff on reduced pay and maternity leave.

Two national recruitment campaigns were run in April and September 2002 for the Prison Officer grade, specifically for the female estate and the emergency build programme. Due to their success, recruits have been provided and continue to be provided to London establishments, and all officer vacancies in the Kent, Surrey and Sussex area will be filled. In addition, a series of local adverts throughout the London and south-east area are planned, with HMYOI/Remand Centre Feltham currently recruiting.

Departmental Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent in recruiting staff to his Department in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south-east in each year since 1997. [78560]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 4 November 2002]:* The table provides information on the total costs of recruitment schemes run by the Home Office Central Personnel Management Unit, based in Central London, and the Croydon based Human Resources Directorate of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

These costs relate to recruitment schemes run to fill posts in a number of areas around the UK. Separate records of the costs attributable to filling posts in any particular area are not maintained.

£

	CPMU	*HRD*	*Total CPMU + HRD*
1997–98	578,017.96	[1]—	578,017.96
1998–99	289,402.09	233,600.00	523,002.09
1999–2000	915,012.00	1,743,000.00	2,658,012.00
2000–01	1,512,510.37	3,147,000.00	4,659,510.37
2001–02	1,094,289.17	2,544,000.00	3,638,289.17
Total	4,389,231.59	7,667,600.00	12,056,831.59

[1] No costings available (all schemes run in-house)

Detection Rates

Albert Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of reported crime the North Wales police detected in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [79522]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* Details for crime are published for financial years, most recently in "Crime in England and Wales 2001–02", of which table 8.01 contains the data on the amount of recorded crime which is detected. A copy is available in the Library.

The figures available for North Wales are for financial years and are as follows:

(a) 1999–2000: 36 per cent.

(b) 2000–01: 31 per cent.

(c) 2001–02: 28 per cent.

Albert Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a league table of police forces in England and Wales by detection rates. [79523]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 November 2002]:* Details for the financial years 1997–98 to 2001–02, were published in table 8.01 of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2000", and are given in the table. A copy of the publication is available in the Library.

As different police forces have different crime mixes, comparing overall detection rates between forces is of limited value. This is because different types of crime tend to have different detection rates, and so a police force with which has a higher proportion of types of crime with high detection rates will tend to have a higher overall detection rate. Also, police forces may give

priority to tackling particular types of crime, with the detection rate of those crimes having some effect on the force's overall detection rate.

The detection rates for 2001–02 may have been affected in comparison to those of the previous year as a result of some police forces implementing the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard in advance of its national implementation on 1 April 2002.

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which increased the total number of crimes counted in each police force area, and therefore may have affected the detection rate. Detection rates after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

There was a change in the counting rules for detections on 1 April 1999, the new instructions providing more precise and rigorous criteria for securing a detection, with the underlying emphasis on the successful result of a police investigation. For example, detections obtained by the interview of a convicted prisoner were no longer included. Numbers of detections before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

Recorded crime: annual detection rates by police force area and region 1997–98 to 2001–02

Percentages

Police force	*1997–98*[1]	*1998–99*[2]	*1999–2000*[3]	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Cleveland	23	23	22	21	20
Durham	30	33	32	34	33
Northumbria	26	30	31	31	31
North East Region	26	29	29	29	29
Cheshire	34	37	31	30	26
Cumbria	41	44	39	34	32
Greater Manchester	20	25	23	22	21
Lancashire	29	34	29	27	26
Merseyside	31	31	26	28	24
North West Region	26	29	26	25	23
Humberside	21	22	19	21	20
North Yorkshire	26	33	31	30	26
South Yorkshire	32	32	25	25	23
West Yorkshire	27	27	25	23	19
Yorkshire and the Humber Region	27	28	24	24	21
Derbyshire	26	31	28	26	25
Leicestershire	34	34	30	28	28
Lincolnshire	46	40	28	25	27
Northamptonshire	35	33	33	33	31
Nottinghamshire	26	25	21	20	18
East Midlands Region	31	31	27	25	24
Staffordshire	34	32	22	23	24
Warwickshire	29	26	22	22	25
West Mercia	27	34	29	27	29
West Midlands	25	30	27	28	29
West Midlands Region	28	31	26	27	28
Bedfordshire	35	33	25	27	25
Cambridgeshire	28	29	25	24	22
Essex[4]	28	29	30	26	26
Hertfordshire[4]	33	34	27	24	24
Norfolk	36	37	30	26	25
Suffolk	39	41	36	35	33
East of England Region	32	33	29	26	26
London, City of	28	33	32	27	34
Metropolitan police[4]	25	22	16	15	14
London Region	25	22	16	15	14
Hampshire	30	35	32	29	29
Kent	31	34	33	28	28
Surrey[4]	35	40	32	28	25
Sussex	26	25	25	23	25
Thames Valley	25	25	20	22	24
South East Region	28	30	27	25	26
Avon and Somerset	26	24	22	22	14
Devon and Cornwall	34	36	35	34	32
Dorset	30	31	26	25	27
Gloucestershire	26	31	30	31	30
Wiltshire	32	38	33	30	30
South West Region	29	31	28	27	23
Dyfed Powys	62	69	65	63	64
Gwent	51	55	53	57	55
North Wales	36	43	36	31	28
South Wales	36	39	31	32	33

Recorded crime: annual detection rates by police force area and region 1997–98 to 2001–02

Percentages

Police force	*1997–98*[1]	*1998–99*[2]	*1999–2000*[3]	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Wales	41	46	40	41	39
England and Wales	28	29	25	24	23
England and Wales[5]	29	31	28	27	26

[1] Excluding offences of "other criminal damage" of value £20 and under prior to March 1998.
[2] Percentage detected using the expanded coverage and revised counting rules which came into effect on 1 April 1998.
[3] Revised detections guidance was implemented on 1 April 1999.
[4] Forces affected by boundary changes in April 2000.
[5] Excluding London Region.
Note:
Numbers of recorded crimes and detections will be affected by changes in reporting and recording. For further information see chapter 3 in "Crime in England and Wales 2001–02".

Disability Discrimination (Prisons)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to start applying the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to prisons and prisoners. [77850]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 20 October 2002]:* The Prison Service has already issued policy guidance for the management of disabled prisoners and staff to all establishments. This reflects the requirements of each stage of the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).

Prisoners are required to review and change, if necessary, their procedures and practices and to make reasonable adjustments to their services and facilities to ensure that they are accessible to disabled people. Prisons have also published local policy documents outlining what people with disabilities are able to expect at that establishment.

The Prison Service is developing a comprehensive disability strategy which will ensure disability issues are reflected in its practices and policies. This will raise awareness and commitment, and enable the Prison Service to implement the final stage of the DDA in 2004.

Domestic Violence and Rape

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has collated of variations between different police force areas in England and Wales in *(a)* recorded instances of rape, *(b)* recorded instances of domestic violence, *(c)* the clean up rate of recorded instances of rape and *(d)* the clean up rate of recorded instances of domestic violence. [75069]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Drug Arrests

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been arrested for possession of *(a)* cannabis, *(b)* ecstasy and *(c)* heroin in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [78961]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information collected centrally on arrests for notifiable offences does not separately identify individual offences. However, data provided in the table shows persons found guilty, cautioned, given a fiscal fine, or dealt with by compounding for possession of cannabis, ecstasy-type and heroin from 1996–2000. The figures cover the UK.

The data are taken from the annual Home Office Statistical Bulletin, which is available on the RDS website (http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb402.pdf), and copies are available in the Library. These figures are due to be updated in the spring of 2003.

Table 1. Number of persons found guilty, cautioned, given a fiscal fine, or dealt with by compounding for unlawful possession of cannabis, ecstasy-type, heroin in the UK, 1996 to 2000[1]

	Cannabis	*Ecstasy-type*	*Heroin*
1996	65,095	2,983	4,958
1997	79,085	3,149	7,231
1998	91,148	2,430	9,681
1999	82,129	3,456	10,326
2000	70,306	5,194	9,608

[1] No court appearance data available for Northern Ireland 1998 to 2000.
Note:
Breakdown by drug type for Northern Ireland not available for 1996 to 2000.
Source:
Home Office Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom, 2000(Supplementary Tables.

Drug Treatment

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total annual cost per drug treatment place, broken down by treatment type, is in 2002–03. [79573]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information in the format requested is not available. Data is held on the cost per week and the average cost per individual is as follows:

Residential treatment costs between £250 and £1000 per week, depending on the services provided. These range from a hostel place supported by out-patient treatment, to in-patient treatment including medical services.

In 2002–01 there were 118,500 individuals reported as in contact with treatment agencies, at a cost of £310 million. This provides an average cost of £2,616 per individual.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been imprisoned for breaches of drug treatment and testing orders; [78486]

(2) how many drug treatment and testing orders have been made by the courts; and how many have been breached. [78485]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance has been given to judges and magistrates on the enforcement of drug treatment and testing orders in relation to prison overcrowding. [78599]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Drug Treatment Places

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug treatment places were available in each year since 1997, broken down by treatment type. [79572]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information in the format requested is not available.

Data is currently held on the estimated number of people in all treatment types as follows:

1998–99	102,133
1999–2000	110,013
2000–01	118,500

From 2001–02 more robust data will be held on the numbers in treatment. These figures are not yet available.

The National Treatment Association (NTA) was set up in 2001 to substantially increase treatment provision.

Drugs (Government Targets)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his most recent assessment is of the progress made in achieving Government targets on drugs use and harm announced in 1998. [79403]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information on progress against current Government targets concerning the misuse of drugs can be found in the Home Office Annual Report 2001–2002, a copy of which is in the Library. The section related to drugs, Aim 5, is on pages 170 and 171.

The Government has recently undertaken a review of the drugs strategy, progress against targets, their balance and focus. We will be publishing an updated strategy later this year.

Drugs Education Programmes

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of *(a)* Operation CHARLIE and *(b)* other anti-drugs education programmes in reducing drug use in those who took part in them in each of the past five years. [79404]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The results of three major drug education programmes, developed by the Home Office, have been published during the past five years.

In 1997, the Home Office published an evaluation of Project CHARLIE (Chemical Abuse Resolution Lies in Education). This project involved 44 children in primary schools in Hackney between 1991 and 1993. Four years after the programme both tobacco and illegal drug use were significantly lower among Project CHARLIE children than among pupils who had not been involved in the project.

In 2001, final results of the NE Choices programme were published. This prevention programme, based in the north-east of England, was targeted at young people aged between 13 and 16. There was no evidence of an impact of the programme on the overall prevalence of drug use. However, a small proportion (2 per cent.) of pupils changed their drug taking behaviour from consumption of Class A drugs to the use of cannabis, solvents or nitrites or to non-use.

Similar findings are found in the 2002 results of the evaluation of the Integrated Programme (IP). The IP is based on North American evidence that school programmes that are reinforced by parent involvement and community engagement have an impact on reducing drug taking. The IP was designed and delivered to adolescents in Northern England during 1998 to 1999. The IP was a demonstration project that was too small to generate significant reductions in prevalence. However, the results suggest that young people who received the IP were more likely to reduce harder drug use and maintain a lower-risk drug-taking repertoire than those who had not participated in the programme.

Since these three projects were commissioned, an overview of international research has been completed. This identified two prevention programmes with the greatest impact on behaviour which had been developed in the United States. On the basis of this evidence, the Government have established a research programme called "Blueprint". This will determine whether elements of US "what works" programmes: (1) can be implemented within the UK settings; (2) have potential to be effective in reducing drug use, and (3) have added value for schools, parents and young people.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted persons were subject to electronic tags as at *(a)* 30 September 2001 and *(b)* 30 September 2002. [76997]

Hilary Benn [*holding answer 28 October 2002*]: The number of convicted persons who were subject to electronic tags was 3,219 on 30 September 2001 and 5,130 on 30 September 2002.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is given to *(a)* judges and *(b)* magistrates on the imposition of sentences involving electronic tagging; and if he will make a statement. [76998]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Emergency Telephone Numbers

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been done into the provision of a second emergency telephone number to work in conjunction with 999. [41946]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

EU Citizenship

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the award of EU citizenship to individuals from third countries residing inside the European Union. [80044]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Evangelical Lutheran Church of England

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to grant dispensation to the member churches of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England to register under the Charities Act 1993 as individual charities making individual returns and submitting individual accounts. [80319]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Feltham Young Offenders Institution

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people are detained at Feltham Young Offenders Institute; and if he will provide a breakdown of this figure by ethnic origin. [45715]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Female Prison Population

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what he attributes the recent rise in the female prison population. [43535]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Rural Policing

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what impact he estimates the focus on the fight against urban crime will have on policing rural areas. [76948]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Fine Default

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were jailed in England and Wales for fine default in each year since 1990. [20288]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Fireworks

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of damage to property were caused by fireworks in *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* each of the preceding five years. [77972]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Focus Group Research

Mr. Allen To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use he and his Department has made of focus group research since June 2001; if he will identify for each research project the topics covered, the person or organisation carrying out the research, and the total cost; and if he will publish the research on his Department's website. [74994]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office research department undertakes a wide range of research activities that support the development of information-led policy, including scientific and social research, and includes research gathered from market research and focus groups.

The department conducts or commissions focus groups only when it is justified by the specific needs of a particular policy or programme and when this is the most economical, efficient and effective way to achieve the purpose. Consulting and involving the public helps inform both policy formulation and the delivery of better quality public services. It has not been possible to provide detailed breakdown of costs of projects where this information is either not held centrally or is commercial in confidence.

The Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) conducts social research supporting all seven Home Office aims. A list of RDS publications is available on the Home Office website and copies are also placed in the Library.

Football (Banning Orders)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK citizens were given banning orders prior to England's international football match in Slovakia; and of these how many did not have a criminal conviction. [78524]

Mr. Denham: All of the 1,301 individuals subject to a football banning order prior to the Slovakia v England match have at least one criminal conviction. In accordance with police powers set out in section 21 of the Football Spectators Act 1989, an additional 13 individuals were intercepted en-route to Slovakia, prevented from travelling and made subject to banning order proceedings. All of the individuals concerned have convictions for violence or public order offences.

Football Matches (Policing)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the average cost to public funds was for policing at *(a)* Premiership, *(b)* Nationwide league and *(c)* non-league football ground on a match day in England in the last 12 months; [78885]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cost to public funds of policing at Premiership football grounds in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [78886]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not held centrally. A working group comprising representatives of Government, police and football authorities has been set up to examine a range of strategic football-related public order issues, including the cost of, and charging arrangements for, policing football matches.

Handcuff Cleaning

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what protocols are in place for cleaning handcuffs used on different prisoners *(a)* in prisons and *(b)* by police forces. [74963]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Identity Parades

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue a general guidance to chief constables that citizens who help the police and the prosecuting authorities by attending identity parades as witnesses should be entitled, without a supervising discretion, to their reasonable expenses and loss of earnings for so doing. [77100]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Illegal Immigrants (Use of Services)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policies are on the use by illegal immigrants of *(a)* the UK's benefits systems, *(b)* the NHS and *(c)* the education system. [78588]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 ensures that only those people who have the right to settle in the United Kingdom should have access to social security benefits. The Act excludes from, 3 April 2000, all persons subject to immigration control from income related and other non-contributory benefits. Instead asylum seekers are supported while the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) determines their case.

There remains, however, a stock of existing asylum seekers whose cases date from before 3 April 2000. They and a few other excepted groups still receive social security benefits.

Persons with no status to remain in the United Kingdom who are not seeking asylum are entitled neither to social security benefits nor NASS support.

A person who has made a formal application for permission to take refuge in the United Kingdom, or who has been granted refuge, is fully entitled to National Health Service (NHS) treatment without charge.

People who are not ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom are subject to the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989, as amended. These regulations make people who are not specifically exempt liable for the cost of most types of hospital treatment other than that given in Accident and Emergency departments or some types of treatment which are necessary to safeguard wider public health.

All children in this country, regardless of their immigration status, are entitled to receive education.

Immigration

Keith Vaz: : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued to CIOs at the ports on their dealings with hon. Members. [80045]

Beverley Hughes: The instructions given to all Immigration staff mirror those contained in the booklet entitled "Information for Members of Parliament about immigration and nationality enquiries".

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when his Department intends to reply to the letter of 1 August from Mrs. S. Jakobi of Stoke Mandeville acknowledged by his Department's Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Liverpool on 29 August. [78365]

Beverley Hughes [*holding answer 31 October 2002*]: I am sorry that my officials at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) in Croydon cannot trace Mrs. Jacobi's letter. If a further letter with sufficient details such as full name, date of birth and nationality can be sent to the Briefing and Complaints Section 5th Floor, Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road, Croydon CR9 2BY, IND will ensure that a response is sent as a matter of priority.

Immigration Offences (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were detained by the PSNI and RUC on immigration offences during each of the last three years. [78730]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration Service does not routinely collect the information requested. A check of information which is held by Immigration Service would be time consuming and disproportionately expensive and would not in any event, represent the full total of police arrests since a proportion of these may have originated, and have been recorded, as matters not related to immigration offences.

Incitement Law

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make a statement on the guidance he plans to issue to police on enforcing the proposed incitement law covering religious and racial hatred. [16883]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39073]

Hilary Benn: Tables, which have been placed in the Library, show the total advertisements run by the Home Office Central Personnel Management Unit and units with devolved or partially devolved responsibility for recruitment. The tables show details of recruitment schemes run from 1 October 2001 to 30 September 2002.

Details of specific media used for advertisements are not available. The Central Personnel Management Unit normally advertises junior posts in local jobcentres and local or regional press. More senior posts are advertised in "quality dailies" (e.g. *Guardian*, *Times*, *Sunday Times* and *Observer*) and, where appropriate, specialist journals. The Home Office has a standing policy to advertise vacancies in the Ethnic Minority Press.

Lay Observers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) if he will publish his responses to Lay Observers' Panels reports, and subsequent recommendations; [79612]

(2) when he received the last Greater London Lay Observers' Panel report; and what actions he plans to take in response to its recommendations. [79613]

Mr. Blunkett: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Auld Review

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of recommendation 321 of Lord Auld's Review of the Criminal Court in respect of access by the prosecution to appeal hearings [20324]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Market Research

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to issue guidance to local authorities on controlling market research canvassing in town centres. [29840]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Meetings

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent meetings Ministers and officials in his Department have held with the United States Administration Head of Homeland Security. [80355]

Mr. Blunkett: I met Governor Ridge and his staff yesterday and will have further meetings with them today for a discussion of the current terrorist threat and the measures we are both taking in response. To assist Governor Ridge, I have prepared a briefing paper on the UK dimension, a copy of which is available in the Library and on the website www.homeoffice.gov.uk/new.htm.

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when mental health charity MACA can expect an answer to its letters of 22 August 2001, 16 October 2001, 19 December 2001 and 30 January 2002 about police handling of serious incidents involving people with mental health problems. [45194]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Metropolitan Police (Training)

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recruits have entered training for the Metropolitan Police in each month since 1 July 1999. [18652]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Metropolitan Police Service

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers working shifts at *(a)* Kennington Police Station and *(b)* other police stations inside the congestion charging zone will be affected by the introduction of congestion charging; and what arrangement the Metropolitan Police Service has made to compensate officers for their extra costs. [80012]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Ministerial Transport Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for his Department in each of the last four years. [27912]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mobile Phone Theft

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government is doing to combat mobile phone theft. [27180]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Money Laundering (Egmont Group)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reports have been made *(a)* to the UK and *(b)* from the UK to other countries under the Egmont Group arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [77216]

Mr. Blunkett: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Moving Traffic Offences

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what statutory powers a non-uniformed police constable may report a driver for a moving traffic offence. [80006]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

North Sea Camp Prison

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category D prisoners from HMP North Sea Camp have been found to have been in breach of their community visit licences for violations of the no alcohol rule and have not been transferred to category A, B or C prisons in the past 12 months. [76653]

Hilary Benn: [holding answer 29 October 2002]: In the 12 months to 22 October 2002 prisoners at North Sea Camp breached the no alcohol rule on 42 occasions. None of the 42 cases resulted in transfer to closed conditions for breach of this rule alone, although in some cases a breach will have contributed to a return to closed conditions.

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category D prisoners from HMP North Sea Camp have been issued in the past 12 months with community day visit licences restricting them to *(a)* a specific geographical area and *(b)* a general mileage radius. [76654]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Community day visit licenses have been issued on 1,298 occasions since 22 October 2001. In all cases there were restrictions on geographical location and mileage radius.

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the rules and of the standard licence governing the community visit licences of category D prisoners in *(a)* HMP North Sea Camp and *(b)* other category D prisons. [76655]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Instructions about the release of any prisoner on an earned community visit are given in Chapter 3 of Prison Service Order 4000 (Incentives and Earned Privileges, Earned Community Visits and Compacts). Appendix 1 to the chapter contains a template of a standard licence. Copies of all Prison Service Orders are in the Library.

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category D prisoners from HMP North Sea Camp have been transferred to category A, B and C category prisons as punishment for breaches of their community visit licences in the past 12 months. [76652]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 29 October 2002]:* Seventeen prisoners have been transferred from North Sea Camp to higher category prisons in the 12 months prior to 22 October 2002 for breaches of community visit licences.

Notifiable Offences

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the number of *(a)* notifiable offences, *(b)* convictions and *(c)* convictions as a percentage of notifiable offences for each year from 1990–91 to 2001–02, *(i)* in total for England and (ii) broken down by police authority; and if he will make a statement. [77500]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* Convictions for notifiable offences are only available on a consistent basis for all areas for 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01. The available information is contained in the table.

Notifiable offences and offences convicted, by police force area, 1998–99

	Total number in year		
Police force area	*Notifiable offences*	*Offences convicted*	*Offences convicted as a percentage of recorded crime*
Avon and Somerset	150,089	16,766	11.2
Bedfordshire	49,076	6,292	12.8
Cambridgeshire	67,256	8,660	12.9
Cheshire	65,119	14,792	22.7
Cleveland	67,030	10,650	15.9
Cumbria	40,202	9,257	23.0
Derbyshire	84,459	12,090	14.3
Devon and Cornwall	110,644	16,568	15.0
Dorset	52,755	7,699	14.6
Durham	50,413	9,797	19.4
Essex	95,797	15,029	15.7
Gloucester	48,206	6,496	13.5
Greater Manchester	362,450	53,016	14.6
Hampshire	128,253	28,121	21.9
Hertfordshire	49,309	8,489	17.2
Humberside	130,691	15,456	11.8
Kent	129,340	18,701	14.5
Lancashire	118,117	27,843	23.6
Leicestershire	93,397	13,260	14.2
Lincolnshire	46,670	7,944	17.0
Merseyside	140,874	25,367	18.0
Metropolitan Police (inc City of London)	941,398	97,011	10.3
Norfolk	57,129	10,305	18.0
North Yorkshire	55,309	10,450	18.9
Northamptonshire	65,466	9,062	13.8
Northumbria	151,298	27,762	18.3
Nottinghamshire	135,255	17,859	13.2
South Yorkshire	133,059	20,581	15.5
Staffordshire	91,919	15,378	16.7
Suffolk	39,908	7,919	19.8
Surrey	42,467	6,310	14.9
Sussex	130,402	12,904	9.9
Thames Valley	176,477	19,307	10.9
Warwickshire	38,485	5,196	13.5
West Mercia	81,777	13,909	17.0
West Midlands	314,628	44,398	14.1
West Yorkshire	273,809	41,586	15.2
Wiltshire	38,189	7,973	20.9
England	4,847,122	700,203	14.4

Notifiable offences and offences convicted, England 1990 to 2001–02

Period	*Notifiable offences*[1]	*Offences convicted*[2]	*Offences convicted as a percentage of recorded crime*
1990	4,314,363	—	—
1991	5,005,135	—	—
1992	5,304,459	—	—
1993	5,247,237	—	—
1994	4,991,748	—	—
1995	4,852,894	—	—
1996	4,790,306	—	—
1997	4,361,391	—	—
1998–99	4,847,122	700,203	14.4
1999–2000	5,045,684	701,692	13.9
2000–01	4,931,747	658,526	13.4
2001–02	5,285,317	—	

[1] There were revisions to counting rules for notifiable offences in the period in question, in April 1998, and the new National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) is thought to have had an effect on 2001–02 figures of recorded crime.

[2] Only available on a consistent basis for three financial years.

Sources:
Criminal Statistics, England and Wales
Crime in England and Wales, 2001–02
Home Office Court Proceedings Database

Notifiable offences and offences convicted, by police force area, 2000–01

	Total number in year		
Police force area	*Notifiable offences*	*Offences convicted*	*Offences convicted as a percentage of recorded crime*
Avon and Somerset	149,254	17,186	11.5
Bedfordshire	49,627	6,182	12.5
Cambridgeshire	64,343	7,564	11.8
Cheshire	63,288	13,592	21.5
Cleveland	64,357	11,150	17.3
Cumbria	32,869	7,432	22.6
Derbyshire	81,668	11,860	14.5
Devon and Cornwall	102,853	14,879	14.5
Dorset	50,320	6,853	13.6
Durham	44,702	9,917	22.2
Essex	106,768	13,536	12.7
Gloucester	49,871	6,854	13.7
Greater Manchester	363,454	54,403	15.0
Hampshire	133,553	23,495	17.6
Hertfordshire	64,215	8,282	12.9
Humberside	110,312	13,750	12.5
Kent	128,382	17,043	13.3
Lancashire	117,633	22,599	19.2
Leicestershire	86,422	13,155	15.2
Lincolnshire	44,884	8,447	18.8
Merseyside	142,807	25,250	17.7
Metropolitan Police (inc City of London)	1,002,488	83,186	8.3
Norfolk	57,259	9,318	16.3
North Yorkshire	51,551	9,310	18.1
Northamptonshire	56,731	6,658	11.7
Northumbria	134,777	25,520	18.9
Nottinghamshire	139,903	18,719	13.4
South Yorkshire	125,179	21,270	17.0
Staffordshire	104,705	16,223	15.5
Suffolk	44,317	7,655	17.3
Surrey	63,321	6,690	10.6
Sussex	136,920	11,696	8.5
Thames Valley	187,989	20,360	10.8
Warwickshire	36,963	4,261	11.5
West Mercia	78,354	13,097	16.7
West Midlands	364,245	48,156	13.2
West Yorkshire	258,908	35,651	13.8
Wiltshire	36,555	7,327	20.0
England and Wales	4,931,747	658,526	13.4

Offenders (Safety)

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the safety of and conditions for offenders kept in court cells and transported in prison vans in London is being monitored while inspections by the Greater London Lay Observers Panel are suspended. [79068]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Open Prisons

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the regime in open prisons; and if he will make a statement. [77393]

Hilary Benn: Open prisons hold large numbers of short-term prisoners who have been carefully assessed and identified as low risk.

In addition to their role with short-term prisoners, open prisons contribute towards the resettlement of prisoners coming towards the end of medium and long-term sentences, including life sentence prisoners. This aspect of their work involved the selection and oversight of prisoners engaged in unpaid community work and, for those within 12 months of their parole eligibility date, in full-time paid employment. These opportunities are only available to prisoners who have passed a stringent risk assessment process, and whose progress and behaviour are subject to constant review.

The arrangements for the resettlement role of open prisons are contained in the National Framework of Requirements for Resettlement Regimes which was issued in November 2001. The Prison Service will shortly review the way in which the National Framework has operated during its first 12 months.

Parliamentary Questions and Letters

Mr. Burstow To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to him from hon. Members in this session remain unanswered, broken down by those which are *(i)* one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and *(v)* over six months old. [79943]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Passport Agency Contracts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Passport Agency contracts by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49651]

Beverley Hughes: The original business case for replacing the obsolete passport production system (PIMIS) and improve the efficiency, effectiveness and security of the passport document compared a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) solution with non-PFI which resulted in the PFI solution being £32 million cheaper to public funds over the proposed 10 years of any system:

	£ million
Upgrade to digital in-house system	371
PFI solution	339

Since the business case was completed in July 1997 there have been many changes to the Agency, with major initiatives including modernisation, anti-fraud and customer service improvements. The flexibility within the PFI contract has allowed the Agency to drive forward on these initiatives in the most economical fashion calling on our private sector partners' expertise and achieving improvements through a controlled and negotiated contract change control process.

Now that the PFI solution is fully in place at all seven passport offices an efficiency strategy for the remaining years of the contract is being formulated with efficiencies expected to be realised for financial year 2002–03 onwards.

Police (Civilian Employment)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many civilians per thousand population are employed by each police force; [79137]

(2) how many civilians are employed by each police force. [79144]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Police (Overtime)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average overtime rates were per officer for each police force in the UK in the last year for which figures are available; and what the latest figures are for the cost of overtime in each police force. [25106]

Mr. Denham: The Office of Manpower Economics (OME) undertakes an annual sample survey of police officers' pay, including overtime pay for constables and sergeants, on behalf of the Police Negotiating Board for the United Kingdom.

The latest figures available from the survey show average weekly overtime payments made to constables and sergeants in the different regions, in respect of the pay period—two weeks, four weeks or a calendar month—which included 6 November 2001. These are calculated from grossed up figures by dividing the total overtime payments received by the officers in the rank by the total number of officers in that rank.

The results of the sample survey are set out in the first set of tables.

The Home Department has collected figures for the cost of overtime in 2001–02 for each police force in England and Wales. The figures are set out in the final table.

OME survey: November 2001

Uniformed constables — *£ week*

Region	*Overtime pay: Rest day with less than 8 days notice*	*Overtime pay: Rest day with between 8 and 14 days notice*	*Overtime pay: Other overtime*
London	39.63	4.10	45.36
Ulster	16.73	9.43	95.51
Scotland	10.18	2.13	26.62
Metropolitan authorities	6.55	10.33	17.70
Shire counties	8.52	5.43	18.90
Wales	2.07	1.67	16.71

Uniformed Sergeants — *£ week*

Region	*Overtime pay: Rest day with less than 8 days notice*	*Overtime pay: Rest day with between 8 and 14 days notice*	*Overtime pay: Other overtime*
London	40.19	6.24	40.37
Ulster	17.04	11.38	91.40
Scotland	9.35	3.38	28.76
Metropolitan authorities	9.84	13.83	18.90
Shire counties	14.47	10.20	21.98
Wales	2.59	0.00	18.11

Detective constables — *£ week*

Region	*Overtime pay: Rest day with less than 8 days notice*	*Overtime pay: Rest day with between 8 and 14 days notice*	*Overtime pay: Other overtime*
London	15.38	2.92	82.31
Ulster	54.40	2.57	142.72
Scotland	26.24	0.89	79.90
Metropolitan authorities	13.83	4.59	49.91
Shire counties	14.24	2.77	54.27
Wales	4.22	0.43	65.90

Detective sergeants — *£ week*

Region	*Overtime pay: Rest day with less than 8 days notice*	*Overtime pay: Rest day with between 8 and 14 days notice*	*Overtime pay: Other overtime*
London	18.38	6.95	88.85
Ulster	54.98	10.56	166.22
Scotland	16.83	0.49	75.13
Metropolitan authorities	59.58	8.58	64.05
Shire counties	20.00	3.39	62.76
Wales	8.99	0.00	64.63

Cost of overtime in each police force in England and Wales in 2001–02

Police force	*£*
Avon and Somerset	4,714,390
Bedfordshire	4,008,599
Cambridgeshire	4,055,694
Cheshire	3,344,000
City of London	2,374,926
Cleveland	3,620,343
Cumbria	2,094,538
Derbyshire	3,414,300
Devon and Cornwall	7,913,000
Dorset	2,322,306
Durham	3,177,000
Dyfed Powys	1,650,497
Essex	8,310,695
Gloucestershire	2,343,186
Greater Manchester	15,609,544
Gwent	2,138,923
Hampshire	8,556,000
Hertfordshire	7,239,000
Humberside	5,673,104
Kent	8,350,000
Lancashire	6,773,248
Leicestershire	3,323,212
Lincolnshire	2,446,521
Merseyside	10,801,000
Metropolitan	97,031,835
Norfolk	3,349,363
North Wales	2,635,500
North Yorks	3,541,849
Northamptonshire	2,475,000
Northumbria	5,877,079
Nottinghamshire	4,167,751
South Wales	5,550,387
South Yorkshire	6,446,000
Staffordshire	5,928,705
Suffolk	1,715,805
Surrey	5,109,411
Sussex	7,424,486
Thames Valley	12,025,000
Warwickshire	1,816,720

Cost of overtime in each police force in England and Wales in 2001–02

Police force	£
West Mercia	4,343,857
West Midlands	15,870,406
West Yorkshire	11,836,000
Wiltshire	1,814,642

Police (Pay)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress in the Police Negotiating Board towards reform of police pay and allowances; what the timetable is for agreement; and what proposals under consideration would require primary legislation. [29680]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Police Checks (Vehicles)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate his Department has made of the percentage of police checks on vehicles that have failed due to vehicles not being registered with DVLC. [79028]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 6 November 2002]:* The police carry out checks on vehicles for a number of purposes. Information on such checks and their results is not held centrally. Vehicle registration and the accuracy of the vehicle registration record are matters for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

Police Computers

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to promote the introduction of palm top personal computers in police forces. [78587]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 243W, on the action I am taking to increase the time police officers can spend on the streets rather than dealing with paperwork. The introduction of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) for police officers has the potential to make a major contribution to that aim.

The Police Bureaucracy Taskforce identified a clear and pressing requirement for officers to be able to remotely update force systems via a hand-held device. A number of forces are now taking this forward and are piloting the use of hand-held devices. However we need to ensure that any hand-held device is useable in an operational environment and that the technical and information management infrastructure is also in place to provide and send data. That is why we are taking a pilot approach.

Our aim is to identify and spread good practice and provide practical advice and guidance to forces on the implementation and use of mobile data services. We are also providing forces with the new Airwave radio communication system, which when fully implemented will deliver mobile data facilities.

Police Custody

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the maximum distance between the place of arrest and a custody suite persons in police custody should be transported. [77766]

Mr. Denham: There is no central policy on the maximum distance persons should be transported between arrest and a custody facility. Such transfers fall within chief constables' operational discretion. Chief constables are required to designate the police stations which are to be used for the purpose of detaining arrested persons. However, the location and distribution of such stations is entirely a matter for chief constables to decide. Constables do have the power to take arrested persons to non-designated stations in certain specific circumstances. For example, where they are working in an area covered by a non-designated station and they think it will only be necessary to detain the person for a relatively short time.

A further important development in this area will be the planned introduction of "street bail". This will remove the absolute obligation on police officers to take arrested persons to a police station as soon as practicable. Officers will be able to exercise discretion and decide to bail arrestees on the street on the basis that they must undertake to attend a police station at a later time.

Police Funding

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will rank police forces in order of expenditure per thousand population in each police force area. [79143]

Mr. Denham: : I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed increase in the sparsity component to one per cent. As one of the possibilities for change to the police funding formula; and what factors contributed to the calculation of that figure.

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library. [79969]

Police Major Disaster Teams

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who funds *(a)* Centrex and *(b)* the Police Major Disaster Advisory Team; and for what reason British Transport Police Superintendent Tony Thompson has been dismissed from these two bodies; and if he will make a statement. [66445]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Police Numbers

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will rank police forces in order of the number of police officers per thousand population in each force area. [79145]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Police Patrols

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of police officers are patrolling in *(a)* the Metropolitan Police force and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [44078]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Police Powers (Confiscation of Alcohol)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to give further powers to the police to confiscate unopened bottles and cans of alcoholic drinks from youths gathered in public places. [78595]

Mr. Denham: Existing police powers to confiscate alcohol from under-age drinkers in public places are provided by the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997, as amended by section 29 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001.

We are considering representations from the police and others about these powers, and in particular the restriction to confiscating alcohol in sealed containers. We will introduce any changes in the law that may be necessary as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Police Standards Unit

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the head of the Police Standards Unit will be eligible for a bonus; and what the criteria are for the award of this bonus. [30811]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The terms of Mr. Bond's contract state that he may be entitled to a bonus of up to 20 per cent. of his Home Office salary. His eligibility for such a bonus will be assessed in April 2003, according to the contribution which his unit has made to improving police performance over the preceding year.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the pay and conditions of service and secondment arrangements are for the Head of the Police Standards Unit. [30812]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* When first appointed in January 2001, the Director of the Standards Unit, Mr. Kevin Bond was seconded to the Home Office from his employers, Earth Tech Inc. The effect of this was that Mr. Bond's duties and obligations were equivalent to a full-time permanent member of the civil service, but that the Home Office reimbursed Earth Tech for the cost of his services.

From October 2002, Mr. Bond ceased to be an employee of that company and the secondment agreement was replaced with a fixed term employment contract with the Home Office. The salary of £195,000 which Mr. Bond receives from the Home Office is the same as applied under the secondment agreement.

Policing

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of progress in each of the five policing priority areas in England and Wales. [77548]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office is currently assessing the progress made in the Policing Priority Areas (PPAs) established in March this year. Most recently, I chaired an extremely constructive seminar on 8 October, attended by police and Local Authority representatives from each of the five PPA areas, to review and assess the experiences of the pilot sites. I intend to make an announcement about PPAs in the near future.

Policing (Rural Areas)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance on policing in areas where children frequently play. [75099]

Mr. Denham: The Government recognises the importance of providing children with safe places to play and this issue will be carefully considered as part of the Government's review of children's play, jointly launched by the Department for Culture Media and Sport, and the Department for Education and Skills on 15 October. There will be a consultation process as part of the review, which will allow all interested parties to feed in their views.

Policing Charges (Football)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his Answer of 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 640W, on policing charges, when the Working Group on Football will meet; what its remit is; and what opportunities there are for *(a)* clubs, *(b)* supporters and *(c)* other interested parties to make their concerns known in respect of policing charges. [79721]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Prison Deaths

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons died in each *(a)* prison and *(b)* young offenders institution in *(i)* 2001 and (ii) 2002. [78865]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Prison Farms

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his Answer of 26th June, *Official Report*, column 959W, on prison farms, if he is now able to make a statement about the proposed closure of prison farms following the review of the future of the Farms and Gardens Estate. [78959]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Prison Governers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on discretionary powers available to prison governors. [77851]

Hilary Benn: [*holding answer 29 October 2002*]: When exercising their discretion, prison governors must act in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Prison Service as prescribed by the Prison Act 1952, the Prison or Young Offender Institution Rules, and operational instructions.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people now in prison have committed *(a)* 10+, *(b)* 25+, *(c)* 50+, *(d)* 100+, *(e)* 200+ and *(f)* 1,000+ previous notifiable offences; and if he will make a statement. [75737]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Prisoner Exchanges (Australia)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will open discussions with his Australian counterpart on a prisoner exchange arrangement. [78586]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on prisoner exchange arrangements between the UK and Australia. [78473]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Prisoners

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what his policy is on securing *(a)* town visits, *(b)* home leave and *(c)* early release under the tagging system in respect of *(i)* Scottish domicile prisoners and (ii) English domicile prisoners held in prisons located in England; [79389]

(2) if he will list the differences in the status and rights of English and Scottish domicile prisoners held in prisons in England. [79391]

(3) if he will make a statement on the definition of Scottish domicile prisoners held in prisons located in England. [79392]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Prisoners (Privacy)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the guidance on rules to protect the privacy of prisoners from identification in publications by other prison inmates. [77412]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Prisoners (Release)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were released in error from prisons in England and Wales in each of the last five years. [79623]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps the National Probation Directorate is taking to set priorities for the workloads of probation staff. [79624]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of each of the 42 budgets for probation areas in England and Wales is being allocated to the National Probation Directorate's central costs for *(a)* this and *(b)* next financial year. [79691]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the performance data on enforcement and breach for probation areas in England and Wales meet national standards. [79693]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the establishment for probation officers is in Kent; how many Kent has; and how many of these are *(a)* fully qualified main-grade officers and *(b)* trainees. [75189]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) how many trained probation officers left the Probation Service in England and Wales in each financial year since 1997–98. [79625]

(2) how many staff broken down by *(a)* grade and *(b)* function were employed at the National Probation Directorate on *(i)* 1 April 2001, (ii) 1 April 2002 and 1 October 2002. [79690]

(3) how many *(a)* Probation Service officers, *(b)* trained probation officers, excluding trainees and *(c)* clerical, secretarial and administrative staff were in post in the Probation Service in England and Wales on 1 April in each year since 1998. [79626]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Probation Service's national budget was for *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [79689]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many court reports have not been prepared in the specified time by the Probation Service in England and Wales in the last 12 months. [79627]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Public Consultations

Claire Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what public consultations have been commenced by his Department in each month since 20 July; and what the *(a)* start date, *(b)* closing date and *(c)* website address of each were. [80270]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Re-offenders

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to implement the recommendations relevant to his Department in the Social Exclusion Unit report Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners. [76807]

Hilary Benn: I will write to my right hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Registered Charities

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered charities there are in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Northern Ireland and *(c)* Scotland. [79112]

Beverley Hughes: The Charity Commission is the Government Department that registers charities in England and Wales. There are currently 186,320 registered charities in England and Wales. The Inland Revenue is responsible for the recognition of charitable status in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Inland Revenue recognises approximately 7,500 charities in Northern Ireland and 30,025 in Scotland.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Gates of Remembrance Appeal is a registered charity. [79840]

Beverley Hughes: The Gates of Remembrance Appeal is not a charity registered in England and Wales. I understand there is a web-based appeal with this name, which is said to be sharing the proceeds between six ex-service charities. If the honourable member has any concerns about this organisation, he may wish to raise them with the Charity Commission, the regulatory authority for charities in England and Wales, at Harmsworth House, 13–15 Bouverie Street, London EC4Y 8DP.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South of 4 July, *Official Report*, col. 533–4W, what form the consultation on the extension of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 will take. [73216]

Mr. Blunkett: I will be publishing a consultation paper around the turn of the year and will consider responses before bringing forward proposals in relation to any additional public authorities under Chapter 11 of Part 1 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA).

Retail Crime

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has collated on how many shops in high street shopping centres in England and Wales have CCTV systems. [77979]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office does not hold information on privately operated Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) systems in shops. However, West Bromwich was awarded 465,000 under the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative for its town centre CCTV scheme.

RoadPeace

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what actions he proposes to take to respond to the representations from RoadPeace following their meeting with Ministers on 10 October; and if he will make a statement. [79618]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Road Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will ensure that the National Policing Plan for England and Wales includes the requirement for road safety to be a priority responsibility for police forces. [79533]

Mr. Denham: The National Policing Plan will set out the Secretary of State's strategic priorities for policing in England and Wales for the coming three years. The Plan will cover a wide range of policing activity including the important contribution of policing to reducing death and injury on roads. The National Policing Plan will be published by the end of November.

Schemes and Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the schemes and initiatives sponsored by his Department and its agencies which are not the subject of national roll out, showing *(a)* the authorities or areas covered by the scheme and *(b)* the budget of the scheme in the last year for which information is available. [75672]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Schengen Information System

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information on UK nationals is held on the Schengen Information System; and how many nationals this covers. [78120]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Security Operation (Barrow-in-Furness)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what costs were incurred by *(a)* Cumbrian police and *(b)* his Department in the security operation at Barrow-in-Furness for the docking of the Pacific Pintail and Pacific Teal vessels in September. [77772]

Mr. Denham: Cumbria Constabulary inform me that their preliminary estimate of the additional costs incurred on this operation is around 140,000.

The force has an agreement with British Nuclear Fuel Limited (BNFL) for full reimbursement of these costs.

No expenditure has been incurred by my Department.

Sentencing Proposals

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to put forward new sentencing arrangements for motorists who *(a)* kill and *(b)* seriously injure a cyclist. [77071]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Service Failures

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision has been made in contracts and specifications to cover service failures by *(a)* Capita and *(b)* the Criminal Records Bureau that result in *(i)* postponing the inclusion of categories of person in the disclosure system and (ii) delays in processing disclosure applications. [80029]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 221–22W, on sex offenders, what the reasons were for the delay in answering the questions; and what *(a)* statutory provision and *(b)* guidance prevents the publication by Chief Constables of information disaggregated below force level on the number of resident, registered or notified sex offenders. [80056]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Act 1997

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress his Department is making towards implementation of the Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Act 1997. [77275]

Hilary Benn: During the passage of the Regulatory Reform Bill, Ministers announced their intention to use a Regulatory Reform Order to amend the Act, to facilitate its implementation. Officials within the Home Office are currently considering practical proposals to bring about an amendment to the legislation.

Sikhs (Kirpans)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis Sikhs are required to remove their kirpan when entering his Department's buildings. [80369]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Staff Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the working target is for the average number of days absence per staff year in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003. [47730]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Stalking

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what figures he has collated on the extent of stalking of women; and how many women aged 16 to 24 years old have been stalked in the last three years. [78820]

Mr. Denham: The 1998 British Crime Survey included an innovative computerised self-completion questionnaire designed to provide the first reliable measure of the extent of 'stalking' in England and Wales. A nationality representative sample of 9,988 16 to 59 year olds were asked whether they had been subject to 'persistent and unwanted attention' during their lifetime and during the preceding year. Persistent and unwanted attention was described to respondents at the beginning of the questionnaire in the following way:

"People may sometimes be pestered or harassed either by someone they know or a stranger. This person might do things like phoning or writing, following them or waiting outside their home or workplace".

Those who had been subject to such incidents were asked details about their experience. The questionnaire was deliberately designed to capture a wide range of experiences that could potentially be regarded as incidents of 'stalking'. However it should be stressed that these incidents were not necessarily regarded as crimes by the respondents and do not equate to offences under the Protection for Harassment Act 1997.

These results are published in Home Office Research Study 210, which is deposited in the Library. This report indicates that four per cent of women had experienced persistent and unwanted attention in the last year, compared to two per cent of men. 17 per cent of women aged 16 to 19 and eight per cent of those aged 20 to 24 had experienced such in this period. It is possible that those patterns are, at least in part, accounted for by differences in how men and women, particularly young women, interpret both the term persistent and unwanted attention and their own experiences.

Last year prevalence, by age and sex

	Percent victims		
Age	*Women*	*Men*	*All*
16–19	17	3	10
20—24	8	5	7

Age	Percent victims Women	Men	All
All	4	2	3

Note:
Definition of stalking: persistent and unwanted attention (excluding incidents in which the victim and perpetrator were living with each other throughout the period over which the incidents occurred).
Source:
1998 BCS

Statistics Commission (Management Information)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library his reply to the Statistics Commission correspondence on the release of management information following the meeting of the Statistics Commission on 25 September; and if he will make a statement. [78411]

Mr. Denham: It is a matter for the Statistics Commission to decide how to handle my reply.

Stray Dogs

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance to police forces on appropriate temporary housing for stray dogs. [52575]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Street Crime Action Group

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of the Street Crime Action Group. [48575]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Street Crime Initiative

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the figures for burglary and violence against the person were for *(a)* April, *(b)* September and *(c)* in four week periods in the intervening months, for each of the ten force areas in the Street Crime Initiative; and what the figures were for the corresponding period last year. [76168]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Superintendent Ali Dizaei

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of the Independent Advisory Group were consulted by the Metropolitan Police Service when investigating Superintendent Ali Dizaei. [42742]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Targets

Simon Hughes: : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the non-public service agreement targets for his Department. [79614]

Hilary Benn: [*holding answer 6 November 2002*]: The Home Department's current targets are set out in the Home Office Annual Report 2001–02 (CM 5106), and in the relevant business plans of the Department's executive agencies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

Television Purchases

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33229]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Thames Valley Police

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers transferred out of Thames Valley Police in each year from 1998–99 to date. [7914]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian police employees were recruited by Thames Valley Police in the most recent period for which figures are available; how many left Thames Valley Police during that period; and if he will make a statement. [79141]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Throckmorton

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason he has delayed submitting the notification of the proposed development of an asylum accommodation centre at Throckmorton to Wychavon District Council; and if he will make a statement. [79483]

Beverley Hughes: I announced on 5 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 151W, that we have decided not to pursue our proposal for an accommodation centre at Throckmorton airfield in Worcestershire as part of the trial. While we consider that the site itself is suitable, we have not been able to settle the necessary land acquisition arrangements to allow us to develop the site within the time frame of the trial.

Treatment Programmes (Prisons)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many treatment programmes operate in prisons in England and Wales for *(a)* drug dependency, *(b)* alcohol dependency and *(c)* self-harm; and how many of them have been evaluated. [79611]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Turnberry Bilderberg Meeting

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests were made in connection with security arrangements for the Turnberry Bilderberg meeting; if the status of one arrested individual as special constable was consequently revoked; what the costs of policing this event were; what arrangements were made for the use of military transport for security of attendees; how many Bilderberg events have taken place in the UK requiring notification of his Department; when the next such is planned; and if he will make a statement. [78119]

Mr. Blunkett: This is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Vacancies (Probation Service)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies there are in the *(a)* London, *(b)* Sussex and *(c)* Kent probation services. [79629]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Women's Prison, Wales

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans she has to build a women's prison in Wales. [78684]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service currently has no plans to build a prison for women in Wales. The Prison Service view is that new prison development should primarily be concentrated in areas of the greatest shortage of places. Currently these are the north west, the Midlands and London.

The number of women prisoners from Wales, currently around 170, does not justify the building of a female prison. However the Prison Service is well aware of the geographical difficulties being posed for some small sections of the prison population, and their needs would certainly be a consideration in any future plans for the development of the prison estate.

Work Permit Initiative

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on the Work Permit Initiative for teachers on the shortage of teachers in the United Kingdom. [53640]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Young Offender Institutions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offender institutions do not possess in-house child protection protocols and committees. [78016]

Hilary Benn: All young offender institutions in the juvenile estate have developed child protection policies in line with a centrally produced protocol. Each establishment has also appointed child protection co-ordinator (and deputy) and has established a child protection committee.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which agency is responsible for investigating deaths in custody which take place while in young offender institutions. [78058]

Hilary Benn: All deaths in prison custody are investigated by the police who assess any criminal culpability and are subject to a coroner's request, which is held before a jury.

The Prison Service investigates all self-inflicted deaths in custody and conducts a clinical review of the treatment provided to a prisoner dying in prison from natural causes. These procedures apply in respect of adult prisoners, young offenders (18 to 20-year-olds) and juveniles (15 to 17-year-olds).

In addition, juvenile deaths give rise to a serious incident inquiry by the Youth Justice Board, which has responsibility for the placement of juvenile offenders and the appropriate Child Protection Committee may commission a "Part 8" case review, pursuant to Part 8 of "Working Together to Safeguard Children".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many assaults on children under the age of 16 have occurred at each young offender institution in each of the past five years; [78062]

(2) what percentage of *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls under the age of 16 in young offender institutions in each of the past five years have been children in local authority care; [78064]

(3) what percentage of children under 16 who left young offender institutions to return to the community in each of the past five years has had residential accommodation arranged prior to discharge; [78063]

(4) how many of those resident in each young offender institution have been referred, whilst resident, to child protection services in each of the last five years. [78061]

Hilary Benn: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Payment by Giro Order Book

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications for crime rates of the phased reduction in use by the Department of Work and Pensions of payment by giro order book. [74851]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings his Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive Department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72724]

Mr. Blunkett: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Recorded Crime

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the annual change in total recorded crime has been in *(a)* Avon and Somerset and *(b)* England from 1985–86 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [66886]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Street Crime

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether street crime *(a)* fell and *(b)* rose *(i)* in London and (ii) nationally in each September since 1997, compared with (A) the preceding month and (B) the previous September. [71889]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Cambridgeshire Police

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate *(a)* the total funding given by him to Cambridgeshire police in each of the last three years and *(b)* the real terms change in this support in each of those years. [74784]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Air Conditioning (Refrigerant)

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the climate change impact will be of the refrigerant to be used in the air conditioning in his Department's new building in Marsham Street. [74757]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Crime (Harrow)

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much *(a)* street crime and *(b)* burglary was committed in each year since 1996 in Harrow; [74582]

(2) how many crimes were committed in each year since 1996 in Harrow. [74581]

Mr. Denham: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Young Offenders

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provide a breakdown of young offenders by *(a)* types of offence and *(b)* length of sentence in the last 12 months; [73765]

(2) what proportion of those convicted in the last 12 months were young offenders. [73856]

Hilary Benn: The information requested, relating to England and Wales in 2000, is contained in Table 1 (persons aged 10 and under 18 sentenced by offence group) and Table 2 (persons aged 10 and under 18 sentenced to immediate custody by length of sentence).

6 per cent. of those convicted of all offences in 2000 were aged 10 and under 18.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in December.

Table 1: Persons aged 10 and under 18 sentenced for all offences at all courts, by offence group and type of sentence or order, England and Wales, 2000[1]

Offence group	*Total sentenced*	*Absolute/ conditional discharge*	*Fine*	*Average fine amount (£)*	*Community sentence*	*Immediate custody*	*Average custodial sentence length (months)*	*Otherwise dealt with*
Indictable offences:								
Violence against the person	6,424	1,169	366	74	3,601	1,053	11.8	822
Sexual offences	467	48	1	100	313	97	25.7	17
Burglary	6,849	875	170	90	4,030	1,597	9.7	908
Robbery	2,238	81	9	103	1,111	1,005	18.6	194
Theft and handling stolen goods	21,006	6,325	2,629	54	10,026	1,406	5.9	3,276
Fraud and forgery	1,017	269	143	52	516	50	5.5	144
Criminal damage	2,576	611	119	56	1,540	164	13.9	541
Drug offences	3,739	1,112	1,434	49	961	164	15.8	264
Motoring offences	556	26	72	127	296	155	6.5	40
Other[2]	4,388	969	1,112	34	1,615	439	7.2	512
Summary[3]	27,728	9,147	5,891	54	10,201	734	4.0	4,663
Summary[4]	14,492	2,014	9,445	92	1,762	550	4.0	1,020
All offences	91,480	22,646	21,391	70	35,972	7,414	9.7	12,401

[1] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to supply a sample data for magistrates courts proceeding covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Estimates based on this sample are included in the figures, as they are considered sufficiently robust at this high level of analysis.

[2] Excluding motoring offences

[3] non-motoring offences

[4] motoring offences

Table 2: Persons aged 10 and under 18 sentenced to immediate custody for all offences at all courts, by offence group and length of sentence, England and Wales, 2000[1]

Offence group	Total sentenced to immediate custody	Length of sentence: 1 month and under	Over 1 month up to 2 months	Over 2 months up to 3 months	Over 3 months up to 6 months
Indictable offences					
Violence against the person	1,053	—	35	30	485
Sexual offences	97	—	—	1	23
Burglary	1,597	2	34	41	760
Robbery	1,005	—	7	5	242
Theft and handling stolen goods	1,406	6	124	72	890
Fraud and forgery	50	—	4	5	30
Criminal damage	164	—	11	2	67
Drug offences	164	1	3	6	56
Motoring offences	155	—	6	9	92
Other[2]	439	6	34	23	255
Summary[3]	734	8	89	57	579
Summary[4]	550	4	57	39	450
All offences	7,414	27	404	290	3,929

Offence group	Length of sentence: Over 6 months up to 1 year	Over 1 year up to 2 years	Over 2 years up to 3 years	Over 3 years up to 5 years	Over 5 years up to 10 years	Life
Indictable offences						
Violence against the person	264	119	44	48	8	20
Sexual offences	13	20	16	20	3	1
Burglary	457	251	32	19	1	—
Robbery	256	253	142	91	9	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	256	57	—	1	—	—
Fraud and forgery	9	2	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	39	27	8	4	6	—
Drug offences	39	28	15	15	1	—
Motoring offences	42	6	—	—	—	—
Other[2]	84	29	2	5	1	—
Summary[3]	1	—	—	—	—	—
Summary[4]	—	—	—	—	—	—
All offences	1,460	792	259	203	29	21

[1] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to supply a sample data for magistrates courts proceeding covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Estimates based on this sample are included in the figures, as they are considered sufficiently robust at this high level of analysis.
[2] Excluding motoring offences
[3] non-motoring offences
[4] motoring offences

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Development Projects (UK)

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what development projects in the UK receive funding from the *(a)* European Investment Bank and *(b)* European Regional Development Fund, and when these projects will be completed; and what development projects in the UK with funding from the *(i)* European Investment Bank and (ii) European Regional Development Fund will start in the next six months. [77676]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 28 October 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

In 2001, the European Investment Bank invested €2,337 million (£1,469 million) in respect of projects in the UK. This comprised individual loans (for projects in a single sector or region) of €1,734 million (£1,090 million) and global loans (for projects covering more than one sector and/or region) of €603 million (£379 million). Individual loans focused on energy (€144 million (£91 million)), communications (€736 million (£463 million)); three-quarters of which were for improvement of telecommunications networks, water management, together with urban infrastructure (€641 million (£403 million)) and health and education (€212 million (£133 million)). Information on individual projects has been published in the EIB's Annual Report 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library. Information on the EIB's project pipeline is available on the EIB website (www.eib.org). This includes information on loans signed, approved and under appraisal. Annual Reports can also be accessed from the website.

A total of €8,434 million (£5,174 million) will be available from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for projects in the UK over the current funding period, 2000–06. As with the European Investment Bank funding, detailed information on individual projects could be obtained only at disproportionate cost as it is not held centrally by the DTL However, if you are interested in a particular ERDF or EIB-backed project, please write to me again and I will endeavour to obtain the relevant information.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 392**

SESSION 2001–2002

4th November—7th November 2002

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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